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Elite Democracy: Political Competition and Voter Opinion in the 2010 Australian Federal Election

by

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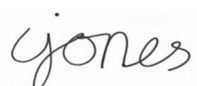
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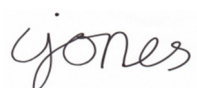
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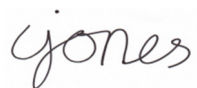
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Statement of Ethical Conduct

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Christopher Paul Jones

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Thesis Abstract

This research investigates the voter-leader nexus by examining the extent to which public opinion mirrors the political attitudes and pronouncements of political elites in Australia. While aggregative-pluralist scholars regard voters as holders of exogenous preferences and political elites as aggregators of these preferences, neo-elitists regard public opinion as actively shaped and manufactured by competitive elites seeking election to political office. These perspectives, while both compelling, are mutually exclusive. Using the 2010 Federal Election campaign as a case study, the research employs a mixed methods approach to compare the plausibility of the two perspectives. The empirical part involves: (a) comparison of the *structure* of voters' political attitudes with those of parliamentary candidates drawing upon the 1990 - 2010 Australian Election Studies and Australian Candidate Studies; and (b) qualitative analysis of the *dynamics* of leader-voter interaction through the use of innovative 'political logs' kept by participants during the 2010 election campaign.

The quantitative analysis confirms the neo-elitist proposition that Labor and Coalition elites polarise more strongly on left-right issues than on *authority* issues, a finding that holds across the 20-year sampled period. The qualitative analysis shows that while participants generally have high levels of *political awareness*, their *political autonomy* is low – as their information is sourced from leaders and parties, and voter agendas increasingly correspond with those of leaders toward the end of the campaign.

This study finds that Australian democracy is far more elite-driven than is currently acknowledged. I conclude that contemporary democracy is characterised by an asymmetrical and elite-dominated social process of persuasion in strategic competition for control of the state. My research contributes to political sociology, demonstrating that political logs offer a valuable supplement to surveys by allowing researchers to examine the dynamics of the voter-leader nexus.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

A bad second week for the government has prompted Prime Minister Julia Gillard to take charge of Labor's flagging campaign, amid criticism of its stage-managed and scripted style.

...

Ms Gillard now says she is throwing the election campaigning rule book out the window. (*The Age* 2010a).

In many respects, the 2010 Australian Federal Election was unique. Labor's former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was removed from office by his party in his first term on the back of poor polling, in a move that surprised political observers and angered voters. His replacement, Julia Gillard, Australia's first female Prime Minister, reshuffled the front bench and made major policy changes. Opposition Leader Tony Abbott was also installed only eight months before the election by a one vote majority. Factional tensions within the political elite reached a high point, which further elevated media and public attention. The persistent agitation around Rudd's removal, and his rumoured leaks to the media, meant that there were three contending 'leaders' in the 2010 election campaign (Kelly 2010a; 2010b), and set the precedent for a strong focus on the leaders during the election campaign. Thus the most distinctive feature of the entire campaign was an unusually high profile of, and high attention paid to, the incumbents of the apex of the national political hierarchy. Australian politics appeared, more than ever, as elite-shaped, as 'elite democracy'.

Most political observers viewed the election campaign as disappointing (c.f. Megalogenis 2010; MacCallum 2010; *Sydney Morning Herald* 2010). The campaign was seen as excessively stage-managed, predictable and lacking in significant policy announcements and discussion. Voters too were frustrated – informal voting increased and turnout decreased over 2007 (Steel 2010; Australian Electoral Commission 2011). Fittingly, neither party won an absolute majority of seats. After 17 days of negotiation, Labor formed minority government with the support of the Greens and three Independent Members of Parliament – the first Federal minority government since 1945.

Political observers also noted a strong media and public emphasis on leaders' personalities and political styles in the 2010 campaign. However, this leadership preoccupation belies important regularities in both campaigning and voting behaviour (McAllister, Bean and

Pietsch 2011: 1). The tightly managed 2010 campaign marks the continuation of the phenomenon of mass-mediated ‘postmodern’ campaigns (Norris 2000; see also Young 2011), the continuation of the ‘personalisation of politics’ (c.f. McAllister 2007), and even a shift toward ‘leader democracy’ (Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012). While social-structural variables such as ethnicity, religion¹ and class continue to exert predictable effects on voting behaviour, their explanatory power has declined since the 1960s (McAllister 2011: ch. 5). Party-voter de-alignment has taken its toll, as parties have fewer loyal voters on whom they can rely than in the past, and elections have become more volatile as a result (Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg 2000). Rather than being an anomaly borne of factional machinations and personal ambitions of two poll-driven leaders and their entourages, the 2010 Australian Federal Election was the culmination of these trends.

The elite- and leader-centred nature of the election campaign provoked and inspired this research project. The large majority of academic accounts of Australian politics – and especially electoral competition – have disregarded the prominent and active role of elites, instead using a voter-centred framework (subsequently labelled here aggregative-pluralist). In their account, electoral competition for votes and mandates focuses on autonomously formed voter preferences. Political candidates – almost invariably pre-selected by party organisations, organised in political parties and headed by a leader – appeal for votes by presenting their views, value positions and intended policies. Those who best match these voter preferences win the electoral contest. But the leader-centricity of the 2010 election does not match this account. As I will demonstrate, voters showed little interest in, engagement with, or knowledge about the election, leaving questions as to how public opinions can be meaningfully collected.

If this is the case, then how are such elections won? Who are the key actors? Are leaders or voters the principal actors in democratic electoral contests? Is the campaign style witnessed in the 2010 Australian campaign an exception or is it typical? Is it an affront to democratic ideals, or intrinsic to democracy – elite democracy? It is these questions that drive my research.

¹ Church *attendance*, rather than religious denomination, makes voters more likely to vote for the Liberal-National Coalition (McAllister 2011: 125-131).

1.1. Focus and aims

Electoral contests are highly institutionalised affairs that follow established constitutional rules and procedures. But this is true only to some extent. The key aspects of competition occur in the social realm that is not subject to such rules and therefore call for sociological interpretations. These interpretations are diverse, but they tend to polarise along the structure-agency dimension. On the one hand, the majority of political sociologists (following Lipset and Rokkan 1967 and Lipset 1981) embrace a social-structural approach. They hold that party platforms, electoral alliances and voter preferences can be best explained by social-structural configurations. In such an account, the party political system represents ‘frozen’ industrial-era social class cleavages. Voters’ political preferences are largely determined by their social-structural milieu. Parties compete to most effectively collect and aggregate these preferences at election time by appealing to the interests of their ‘cleavage’ constituencies, consisting of voters who have fixed and rational preferences (c.f. Downs 1957). On the other hand, there are less popular accounts of politics and electoral competition that identify and focus on the key political actors, typically political elites, who shape the political process and its outcomes (Field and Higley 1980). Which of these two interpretations is more plausible? Which fits better with the empirical evidence examined here?

These questions, re-shaped into more specific research questions, are addressed and explored in the empirical section of the study. The analysis undertaken here assesses the relative plausibility of these competing accounts, both isolated from the multitude of other accounts, and polarised for analytic purposes into two ideal-typical models: aggregative-pluralist and neo-elitist. The research strategy I adopt in comparing these models follows the overall pattern proposed by McAllister (1991), but it is applied to a much broader range of data.

Thus this project has two principal aims. The first is the systematic analytic and theoretical confrontation between the neo-elitist and aggregative-pluralist theoretical models and approaches to contemporary democratic politics, using the Australian 2010 Federal Election as a key case. The second and more general aim is to contribute to our understanding of contemporary democracy, linking the analysis with more general debates about the nature of contemporary politics and the changes it has undergone (c.f. Best and Higley 2010b; Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012).

I am reluctant to call this research strategy ‘hypothesis testing’ due to the tentative nature of my analysis and the paradigmatic nature of the models and perspectives compared. It is difficult to draw concrete and precise hypotheses from such paradigms and to conduct a critical and conclusive test, not least because each approach generates paradigm-specific criteria of validity. The challenge is multiplied by the fact that such broad perspectives are generally formulated by multiple independent theorists. Oftentimes these formulations share a broad compatibility but approach the problem with different assumptions, a fact that will become apparent in my exposition of the aggregative-pluralist approach in Chapter 2.

Despite these challenges, I embrace a moderate interpretation of the Kuhnian (1996) view of research paradigms, and argue for the partial commensurability of such general perspectives. Researchers can partially assess their validity in terms of overall ‘fit’, relative plausibility, and comparative interpretive consistency. Most notable among these is the ability to minimise empirical anomalies, that is, observations that are inconsistent with the interpretive framework. I prefer to call such an assessment a ‘critical confrontation’, rather than a precise adjudication. Before this is undertaken, though, it is necessary to discuss the analytic framework of the study.

1.2. Political sociology, political science

I embrace the perspective of political sociology, which straddles the disciplines of political science and sociology. There are no substantial theoretical differences between the two, and the distinction is borne more of traditional preoccupations and a convenient division of labour than the nature of their analytic toolboxes (Bottomore 1993b: 1-2). Political science tends to embrace an institutional focus. Its traditional preoccupation is with the “machinery of government”, such as legislation and constitutions, electoral rules, and political parties (Bottomore 1993b: 1-2). This is most clearly illustrated in introductory-level university textbooks to politics in Australia. In *Australian Political Institutions* (Singleton, Aitkin, Jinks and Warhurst 2006), students are introduced systematically to the Australian Constitution, the federal system, the parliament, the party system, the bureaucracy, and interest groups. Each institution is defined, and its logic contribution to the greater political system is explained. For the most part, political science makes little reference to the “social circumstances of politics” (Orum 1983: 1), such as the social structure, the economy, or culture. By contrast, political sociology “starts with society and examines how it affects the state” (Bendix and

Lipset 1957, cited in Dowse and Hughes 1972: 7). Political sociology, then, is a branch of sociology that is mainly concerned with the relation between politics and society (Dowse and Hughes 1972: 7).

This relation is analysed by a broad range of sociological concepts, such as ‘ruling class’, ‘ideology’ and ‘interests’ (favoured by Marxist sociologists), ‘authority’, ‘party’ and ‘domination’ (preferred by Weberian scholars), as well as ‘elites’, ‘ruling formulas’ and ‘political alliance’ (used by neo-elitists). The early agenda for political sociological electoral analysis was dominated by the Columbia and Michigan Schools of research (Weakliem 2005).² Columbia University researchers emphasised the role of social-historical cleavages as bases for political parties, and on the role of ‘opinion leaders’ who influenced opinion within these sub-groups. The work of Lipset (1981; Lipset and Rokkan 1967) has been some of the most influential within this tradition. Researchers at the University of Michigan, on the other hand, had a stronger social-psychological focus, emphasising the concepts of party identification (understood as a form of emotional attachment) and political ideology. Their famous ‘funnel’ metaphor of causality regards social cleavages as distal causes of vote choice, which feed into more proximal causes such as party identification and political attitudes (Manza, Brooks and Saunder 2005).

The neo-elitist perspective sits firmly within the political-sociological tradition, but has not been a popular theoretical choice for much of the twentieth century. Its key tenet – that societies are inevitably and fundamentally divided between power-wielding elites and disorganised masses – is commonly taken to mean that elitism is anti-democratic and conservative, and has been repeatedly linked with fascism (Higley and Pakulski 2000[2012]), despite numerous recent attempts to dismiss these misconceptions (c.f. Higley and Burton 2006; Best and Higley 2010b; Pakulski 2012). Elite research following World War II has tended to be morally infused, treating elites as a social problem to be resolved (Khan 2012: 364). An influential example is C. Wright Mills (1956), who argued that the interlocking of the political, business and military elites in the United States had created a caste-like *power elite*, with the implication that they are electorally unaccountable and unable to be displaced. As several scholars have argued, however, elitism and democracy are not only theoretically compatible (Sartori 1987; Pakulski 2012) but contemporary social-structural trends – such as

² Within the Columbia School, see Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) and Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954). In the Michigan School, see Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (1960).

progressive partisan de-alignment, the ubiquity of mass media and their perpetual focus on political leaders – make an elite-centric approach all the more compelling (Pakulski and Körösi 2012).

1.3. Theoretical framework: classical elite theory and neo-elitism

Contemporary neo-elitism is deeply embedded in classical elite theory – as formulated primarily by Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, but also Max Weber and Roberto Michels – that emerged at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century in Europe. It was formulated in the context of a number of societal developments and intellectual concerns triggered by the processes of industrial modernisation, especially the formation of powerful interventionist states. State power was expanding in scope and depth, encouraged by the development and growth of government bureaucracies and the popular press. Bureaucratically organised state administration relied on hierarchy and abstract rules, which transformed political power into authority and increased its efficiency through professionalization of staff and specification of responsibilities (Parry 1969: 15-6). Moreover, the increasingly concentrated power of state and corporate elites gained significant reinforcement in the form of rapidly growing media of mass persuasion – the popular press and radio – that opened the way for systematic ‘shaping’ of public opinion and of political processes.

Further, classical elitists wrote at a time of a rapid expansion of the democratic franchise and the emergence of highly organised, oligarchic political parties (Parry 1969: 17). For the democratic idealists the elitists sought to criticise, the growth of the franchise and the organisation of parties were a contradiction in terms and a betrayal of the ‘rule of the people’. Elite theorists, however, saw these trends as inevitable and constitutive of stable social order. For Pareto and Mosca, modern democracy was a rule by elites whose political-parliamentary segments managed political processes from above, and, to paraphrase Mosca (1939: 154) ‘get themselves elected’. Weber (1968) saw democratisation as intricately linked to modernisation, but democratisation consisted of the widening of the popular franchise and increasing electoral competition, rather than the decentralisation of political power. The modernisation (seen as rationalisation) of politics concentrated and centralised political power in the hands of small ruling minorities that formed at the apex of powerful state apparatus and in bureaucratised mass parties. For Michels (1962) even avowedly egalitarian

socialist parties were doomed to failure unless they were subjected to organisation and minority control. Except for Michels, whose views drifted first towards radical left, and then radical right, the early elitists accepted the Weberian view that modern social order implies legitimate domination, and that democracy can be reconciled with modern centripetal and bureaucratic trends, provided its models accepted the responsible-representative character of modern elites (c.f. Bottomore 1993a; Pakulski 2012). For the elitists, it was absurd to expect the mass to rule, or even affect the exercise of state authority, without organisation. The enfranchised masses gained civic and national dignity, rather than political power or sovereignty. Mosca (1939) refuted this ‘Rousseauistic’ myth of popular sovereignty: “Government in a democracy was certainly *of* the people, it might even be *for* the people, but it was never *by* the people but only by the ruling class [i.e. elite]” (Parry 1969: 25, emphasis in original).

The other principal target of the classical elitists was Marxist historical materialism, which was regarded simultaneously as utopian and misleading. The classical elitists saw Marxism as an ideology, rather than a science of society (Parry 1969: 28). Primarily, elite theorists wished to counter the Marxist conception of a ruling *class* – a large social grouping distinguished by specific property relations, especially ownership of the means of production – by demonstrating the concentration of power in the hands of small and cohesive elites, with relatively diverse social bases and continual mobility or ‘circulation’ (Bottomore 1993: 10). While Marxist scholars stressed the importance of economic power, elite theorists emphasised the greater effectiveness of authoritative political domination through the state. Politics, for classical elitists, was not determined by the dominant socio-economic class interests, but by the political interests of the ruling elite and any counter-elite that contests its power.³ More generally, elite theorists wished to show that ruling minorities existed in every organised and large scale human society, making power concentration, and therefore elite rule, inevitable (Bottomore 1993a: 10).

Thus elite theory saw itself as a sober and realistic science of society, replacing the purportedly naïve, idealistic – and therefore misleading – accounts of political modernisation. Mosca says of Marxists: “In the world in which we are living socialism will be arrested only if a realistic political science succeeds in demolishing the metaphysical and optimistic

³ Both Pareto and Mosca nonetheless believed that elites and counter elites must secure the consent and backing of important ‘social forces’ in the masses to maintain their power (Parry 1969: 58-61).

methods that prevail in present social studies” (Mosca 1939: 327). Likewise, Pareto infamously quipped that the notion of ‘popular representation’ was unworthy of analytical attention because “poppycock grinds no flour” (Pareto 1915[1963]: 1569). But while concerned with the ideological message, elite theorists stressed the empirical validity and importance of their formulations. They portrayed elite theory as, above all, the scientific (non-ideological) knowledge – a core of empirically-based political sociology.

Neo-elitism, the contemporary descendant of classical elite theory, emerged in the 1980s, following the decline of Marxist theory (Higley and Pakulski 2000[2012]). The early pioneers of this perspective were demo-elitists, such as Mills (1956), Domhoff (1967) and Dahl (1971), as well as critical theorists of democracy, such as Sartori (1987). In particular, the work of John Higley and his collaborators (e.g. Higley, Deacon and Smart 1979; Field and Higley 1980; Higley and Burton 2006) has proved influential in popularising neo-elitist views, and in applying elite theories in sociological empirical research. Neo-elitism focuses on elites as key social-political actors, but recognises a broad variation in elite composition and structure. It accepts the notion of elite organisation and cohesion, but qualifies the classical view by pointing to the ‘strategic’ and ‘partisan’ fragmentation of modern elites. Higley popularised the concept of *consensual unity* and wide integration as an elite configuration uniquely conducive to the emergence of liberal democratic regimes. I will describe this configuration in some detail in Chapter 2, as it is thought to prevail in Australia (Higley, Deacon and Smart 1979).

Field and Higley (1980) retain the core propositions of the classical elitists while arguing that Pareto, Mosca and Michels placed too much importance on the unity and power of elites. Modern elites vary broadly in both dimensions, and they always require some form of support by non-elites to stabilise their rule. Moreover, the orientations of non-elites are shaped independently by the level of societal development, and are manifested only in very general attitudes and political orientations. Beyond this, elites are left to organise those orientations and “fill in the blanks” (Field and Higley 1980: 19-20).

In contemporary (‘level 4’) societies,⁴ mass orientations are mostly managerial, meaning they accept ubiquitous power differentials and domination, owing to the centrality of non-manual

⁴ Field and Higley’s developmental scheme (1980: 21-25) contains four levels. Level 1 societies are ‘undeveloped’ pre-industrial societies, typified by Western countries prior to the sixteenth century. These

bureaucratic work. The primary conflicts in level 4 societies take place over stable employment and dignified status. ‘Insiders’ with good, stable jobs align themselves against ‘outsiders’ – frequently youth, women, and ethnic minorities – preventing them from entering the employment market and thus threatening insiders’ employment status. Simultaneously, they seek to constrain elite actions that threaten preferable employment arrangements (Field and Higley 1980: 30-1).

Thus, the neo-elitist theoretical model is embedded in an older elite perspective that sees power in all complex societies, both democratic and non-democratic, as inevitably concentrated in the hands of small ruling minorities, known as *elites*. Neo-elitism also holds that politics is a process of domination exercised by these ruling minorities and that social change is initiated from ‘above’ by these key actors. Elites vary widely in their character, size, form, structure and orientation; they form established ruling classes and revolutionary cliques; they are defenders of the status quo, or reformers. What they have in common is a small size; social cohesion, that is, awareness of their shared power interests and the willingness to defend them in a solidary manner; political command over society’s main power resources, especially the state; and organisation. In all these respects, elites differ from, and dominate over, non-elites. While elitism does not ignore the role of social conditions, institutions and other structural factors, it favours actor-centred explanations that see structures as products of elite actors. Similarly, neo-elitists do not neglect or ignore non-elites or the ‘mass’. The very concept of ‘elite’ is a pair concept to ‘mass’, in a similar way as ‘ruling class’ implies and is paired with a subordinate class.

Moreover, both classical and contemporary elitists have always emphasised the dependency of elites on social support of non-elites, described as key support groups or ‘social forces’. Successful elites have to secure and cultivate the backing of these social forces while maintaining their domination. But the power and influence in elite models always flow in a

societies do not contain ‘elites’ in Field and Higley understanding because there are no large-scale bureaucratic organisations to confer elite status. Level 2 societies are characterised by incipient urbanisation and a small working class. The low levels autonomy involved in factory work necessitates the creation of organisations “to preserve order and supply motivation” (Field and Higley 1980: 22) such as police, judicial, and military bodies. Level 3 societies are ‘industrial’ and have a vastly more productive agricultural sector, pushing workers into factory and non-manual work. These first three levels have a preponderance of agricultural labour. Most people are able to conduct their daily work without outside direction, giving them a general egalitarian orientation. Level 4 societies are ‘post-industrial’; a critical proportion of the workforce is involved in non-manual labour, which depends on constant supervision, direction, and domination.

top-down direction. Elites in contemporary democratic societies impose themselves – more or less successfully – on non-elites through electoral campaigns, and they actively generate non-elite backing by attempting to win votes. Democratic regimes differ from non-democratic ones in that their political elites compete for the leadership positions and cultivate mass support, principally by persuasion and manipulation. Elites in non-democratic regimes seldom compete for leadership and they are more likely to use threats, deception, demagoguery and violence.

The neo-elitist perspective turns researchers' attention to national elites as incumbents of top executive positions in the largest and resource-richest organisations: political, business, and media. Political elites are seen as the core component of national elites, and they are located at the apex of state-political hierarchies such as government, parliamentary and party. Modern politics is thus studied as a game in which elites play an autonomous and leading role.

1.4. The background: elite research in Australia

There have been relatively few in-depth studies of Australian political elites – which is somewhat surprising considering the abundant research on the European and US leaders and parliamentarians (Putnam 1976; Best and Cotta 2000; Higley 2011). Most of the Australian studies were undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s – at a time of major change in the Australian political and business elite. There has been a dearth of research since the 1990s (c.f. McAllister 1991; Gilding 2004).

The early (pre-1975) studies generally adhered to either the Marxist concept of ruling class or the Weberian-Millsian 'power elite' theoretical models. For example, Playford (1969; 1972) performed a Marxist analysis of Australian elites, concluding that a distinctive ruling class exists in Australia. The tight integration of government and business elites, the increasing interaction of bureaucratic elites and business, and the growth of 'giant enterprise', signalled a set of interlocking interests concerned with maintaining the capitalist status quo. Indeed, talking about Australia as a mixed economy was fundamentally misleading. State interventions, according to Playford (1969; 1972: 112-3), consolidated capitalist activity and enabled private enterprise to prosper:

The most important *political* fact about our society is the existence of concentrated economic power, whose owners and controllers enjoy a massive preponderance in the determination of the policies and actions of the state and in the political system as a whole (Playford 1972: 154-5).

Connell (1977) also argued for a Marxist understanding of Australian politics. In his view, state elites – both bureaucratic and parliamentary – lacked autonomy. They acted primarily to maintain the institution of private property, and formed part of a broad capitalist ruling class beholden to business interests. As Connell himself admits (1977: 55), the only collective interest of business is the maintenance of private property. This argument may be accurate, but it is also “politically trivial” (Pakulski 1982: 36).

By contrast, Sol Encel’s analysis (1970) was more complex in its evaluation of Australian elites, mainly because the author embraced some elements of both the Weberian and Millsian frameworks. Above all, he portrayed the Australian elite as more autonomous from the propertied class than Connell’s (1977) account suggests. While he believed there was a “loose collection of elite groups linked together by what may be called a *governing consensus*” that maintained the existing class, status and power structures (1970: 4, emphasis in original), he also argued that Australia displayed both pluralist and elitist elements. Multiple groups struggled for advantage, but needed to legitimate their claims within the confines of the governing consensus. Vested interests cohered to the extent needed to maintain this consensus (Reynolds 1991: 95). In Encel’s (1970) analysis, the strength of the bureaucracy; the small size of the largest businesses; a lack of social homogeneity and career coalescence between business and political leaders; and an egalitarian culture, meant that there was little evidence of a single and coherent ruling class, let alone one that was conscious and conspiratorial.⁵

Other studies of Australian political elites have painted them as relatively autonomous, open, widely integrated and consensual. Pakulski’s (1982) study of elite recruitment suggested that, while there was considerable agglutination between power and socio-economic hierarchies, Australian elites were open and diverse in their social backgrounds, and included a strong trade union component in Labor recruitment. This pattern was “difficult to square with hypotheses about an Australian ruling class” (Pakulski 1982: 71) and instead suggested that

⁵ Meisel (1958) used a memorable ‘three C’s’ formula to define elite groups: Consciousness (awareness of belonging to a group), Coherence (interaction and interlocking) and Conspiracy (common will to action).

elites were socially diverse, functionally differentiated and enjoyed relative autonomy within their power domain (c.f. Keller 1963).

The largest and most comprehensive study of Australian elites was undertaken from 1975 to 1977 by John Higley and his colleagues (Higley et al. 1979). It followed from an earlier Norwegian study (Field and Higley 1972) and was used as a systematic case study to establish the veracity of the Higleyan elite scheme. The authors argued that Australia had a *consensual unified elite* characterised by sharp public disagreement among rival political elites, but also a high level of *normative consensus* about how to conduct political competition, high levels of mutual access, and the ability of elites to influence policy outcomes on issues salient to them. This was underpinned by an implicit agreement on the 'rules of the game' wherein elites accept the value of existing political institutions, and temper their conflicts such as not to jeopardise these institutions (Higley et al. 1979: 144). In their interviews, Higley and colleagues discovered that Australian elites had high levels of mutual access, often implying that they could easily meet or communicate with other elite members if needed (Higley et al. 1979: 265). Moreover, the overall system of participation in policy-making had a strongly elitist character. Elites regularly saw the public as ill-informed or indifferent to their cause, rarely regarded the public or their rank-and-file organisational members as important, and thought these groups generally lacked a majority opinion on many issues (Higley et al. 1979: 199, 217-8). The *consensual unified* structure of Australian elites is illustrated, they argue, by stability in the aftermath of the 1975 constitutional crisis. Although it provoked considerable partisan conflict, elites minimised long-term damage by moving debate away from constitutional issues toward economic ones (Higley et al. 1979, cited in McAllister 1992: 232).

Since the early 1990s, research on Australian political elites has been relatively rare. Gilding (2004) investigated the replacement and renewal of the Australian business elite caused by the influx of entrepreneurs beginning in the 1980s. He found that the declining relevance of 'closure' institutions such as exclusive clubs and private schools implied a declining unity among the business elite, further reinforcing the limited usefulness of the concept 'ruling class' in the Australian context. Goldfinch (2002) investigated economic policy elite networks in Australia and New Zealand, and found strong social ties and policy consensus among them. However, it is not entirely clear what researchers are to make of Goldfinch's

(2002) findings; they are somewhat banal in the absence of theoretical questions and theoretical controversy.

McAllister's (1991) analysis of attitudes of parliamentary elites and voters, which is used as the basis for the quantitative part of my research, was one of the few analyses of the top power holders. One of its chief virtues is its general theoretical focus. McAllister sought to test three different explanations for attitudinal difference between elites and the mass public: 'classical' democratic theory, 'democratic elitism', and 'modern elite theory'. Here, classical democratic theory, which places inherent value upon participation and civic education, anticipates that different education levels account for elite-voter differences in political attitudes. Democratic elitism (as derived from Schumpeter 1942; Almond and Verba 1989) anticipates that elite and voter attitudes cannot be bridged by education due to divergent levels of interest, information and organisation. Finally, modern elitism (derived from Higley and his collaborators) anticipates that elite consensus will prevent 'divisive' issues from emerging on the political agenda, and that elite difference on issues that *do* reach the agenda will be greater than those that do not (McAllister 1991: 246). McAllister uses a factor analysis of Australian Election Study data to test which of these theories best accounts for the political attitudes of elites and voters. The quantitative portion of my research elaborates upon this approach, and is discussed in Chapter 3.

Studies of parliamentarians and leaders have been more frequent in the past five years, but they rarely use the elite concept (t'Hart and Uhr 2011; Kane, Patapan and t'Hart 2009; t'Hart and Uhr 2008). One example of contemporary elite analysis is Higley and Pakulski's (2011) Paretian analysis of Australian and United States elites. They claim that since the 1980s, elites in both countries have become more 'leonine' – that is, having a propensity to use force, restore traditional practices and institutions and bestow favours to their 'rentier' economic allies. This is contrasted with 'vulpine' elites, who are regarded as calculating, innovative, and deceptive, and typically ally themselves with entrepreneurial or 'speculative' economic interests (Higley and Pakulski 2011: 25). In Australia, it is argued that Paul Keating and John Howard were forceful and determined leaders. Keating initiated a long series of economic reforms, first as Treasurer to Bob Hawke (1983-1991), and then as Prime Minister (1991-1996). The Howard government's decision to participate in the Iraq invasion, its threats to launch pre-emptive military strikes against terrorists in Southeast Asia, its detainment of large numbers of 'boat people', and its "bare-knuckled" national campaign

victories “have no clear precedent in the country’s hundred years of independence” (Higley and Burton 2006: 190).

Focusing on similar trends to those discussed by Higley and Pakulski, Walter (2008) argues that an anti-democratic ‘command culture’ has emerged in Australian politics, wherein a long-running policy issue is framed as a crisis, presenting opportunities for leaders to centralise power and override institutional checks-and-balances. Walter cites the Howard government’s intervention in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory in 2007 as a prime example. On the basis of preventing child sexual abuse, the government unilaterally imposed severe restrictions on Indigenous communities, including government acquisition of townships, compulsory child health checks, quarantining of welfare payments for poor school attendance, and bans on alcohol and pornography (Walter 2008: 192). Walter sees the circumvention of constitutional and conventional procedures under the Howard government and the micro-management style of Rudd as worrying trends. Public service reforms to increase responsiveness to incumbent governments, the proliferation of minders and advisors who share the leader’s views, and the ‘hollowing out’ of parties into institutions with the sole goal of winning and holding office, have all helped to centralise power (Walter and Strangio 2007: ch. 3). These developments compromise liberal democracy, according to these authors, as they are antithetical to the ideal of decentralised authority (Walter and Strangio 2007: 8).

While analyses of Australian political competition re-appeared in recent years, there have been no attempts to assess the overall utility and plausibility of the elitist framework since McAllister’s (1991) study. While the framework is sometimes unwittingly adopted by critics (Connell 1976),⁶ it has little academic or public notoriety in Australia (e.g. Rhodes 2009).⁷ This makes the task of reviving it, and comparing its utility and plausibility to that of its chief competitor, all the more relevant and urgent.

⁶ Connell uses an elite-style analysis to explain political events in Australia between 1970 and 1975 (Pakulski 1982: 36-7), which belies his systemic focus on the concepts of ‘ruling class’ and its accompanying ‘ruling culture’.

⁷ ‘Elites’ and ‘elitism’ are mentioned a total of four times in Rhodes’s 500-page edited book *The Australian Study of Politics* (2009), mostly in passing.

1.5. Plan of the research

The remainder of the study will be laid out as follows. In the next chapter, I describe and juxtapose the neo-elitist and aggregative-pluralist models and perspectives on contemporary political competition in the context of the key research questions. My focus is on neo-elitism, as elitism generally is less familiar to researchers and the general public, as well as being the subject of a number of misunderstandings and confusions. While the individual theories contained within the aggregative-pluralist family will be more familiar, the label itself requires clarification. Theories under the aggregative-pluralist banner share an emphasis on well-informed voters with exogenous preferences, as well as parties as aggregators of these preferences.

The third chapter is dedicated to describing the data and methods used in the study. The study uses a mixed methods approach, where the quantitative component focuses on establishing the *structure* of elite-mass relations and the qualitative component focuses on its *dynamics*. The quantitative component expands and improves upon the analysis of elite and voter attitudes undertaken by McAllister (1991) by comparing three evenly-spaced surveys across the period 1990-2010. The qualitative portion involves the use of innovative ‘political logs’ kept by participants during the 2010 election campaign. The participants’ agenda of political issues is also compared with that of leaders, using leaders’ quotes and paraphrases in three daily newspapers as a frame.

The fourth chapter presents the results of my survey analysis. The tenets of neo-elitism find strong support in these results. In particular, elites exhibit greater polarisation in their attitudes toward *competition* issues than *authority* issues, suggesting that elites downplay controversial issues. This high level of polarisation also implies that the process of *median voter approximation*, which is central to the aggregative-pluralist account, does not take place. Finally, despite media commentary arguing that politics has become more fractious and polarised in recent times, no evidence of greater polarisation is found in elite or voter attitudes.

In the fifth chapter I present my qualitative analysis of political logs commissioned during the 2010 election campaign. I make a key distinction between the *political awareness* of participants – their level of political knowledge and the sophistication of their arguments; and their *political autonomy* – how independent this knowledge and judgement is from political

leaders and parties. While participants are generally politically aware, their political autonomy is low. Moreover, their agenda of most important issues increasingly converges with that of leaders as the election nears. Both of these findings suggest that contemporary Australian democracy is primarily elite-driven.

In the sixth and final chapter, I use these findings to assess the usefulness of the neo-elitist and aggregative-pluralist perspectives, as well as comment on the general issues concerning the nature of contemporary democracy. If elites have substantial control over the political agenda, and voters have a low level of autonomy, then our everyday understanding of democracy becomes problematic. How is it possible for voters to maintain a dignified role and status in such circumstances? My findings suggest revisions to our implicit standards of good political citizenship are in order.

For now, let us examine the key features of the neo-elitist and aggregative-pluralist approaches to contemporary electoral competition.

Chapter 2 - The Rival Perspectives, Models and Ideal Types

In this chapter, I introduce the two theoretical perspectives on electoral competition. The first one, which I identify as ‘aggregative-pluralist’ (c.f. Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012; Dunleavy and O’Leary 1987; Held 2006) is more popular, and covers a range of theoretical models of contemporary electoral competition that share some important features. They portray this competition as voter-centred and voter-driven. Politicians – both incumbents and candidates – articulate, second-guess and aggregate the views of the ‘median voter’ in order to maximise their chances of electoral success. The second model, labelled here ‘neo-elitist’ (Field and Higley 1980; McAllister 1991; Higley and Pakulski 2008; Best and Higley 2010a), is less popular and depicts electoral contests as principally driven by leaders and the elite networks in which leaders are embedded. Political elites articulate and impose upon voters the agendas and issues, as well as particular political views (‘preferences’), albeit in a competitive manner. Leaders play a prominent role in generating mass confidence during the electoral contest. I juxtapose these two perspectives and place them in confrontation, theoretically and empirically, in order to judge their relative plausibility. However, I dedicate special attention to the neo-elitist perspective, as it is less familiar to political sociologists and influential in framing this research project.

There are several points I emphasise from the outset. The focus of this chapter is on describing and analysing the two models, selected from many other models. I portray these models as *ideal types* of a specific kind – *perspectives* – as well as some derivative *theoretical models* of democratic electoral competition. The models are portrayed in a general and selective manner and with the emphasis placed on their *sociological* aspects. This selectivity means that they are not fully comparable or ‘commensurate’ (Kuhn 1996). They are also treated here as sociological theoretical lenses that analysts wear when examining electoral processes. One consequence of this portrayal, as stressed throughout, is the great difficulty in designing critical tests that conclusively decide which one is correct. Rather, I conduct what can be called a ‘plausibility test’ – a systematic confrontation with empirical data that allows for judging each theoretical model in terms of its ‘fit’.

Such an approach is most useful when the models-perspectives are juxtaposed to make their points of difference clear. However, the shared empirical orientation of both approaches means that, although they start from starkly different intellectual origins, both aggregative-pluralists and neo-elitists will likely arrive at similar understandings of the political process as their research traditions progress. Thus there is likely to be substantial bleeding between the disciplines. Indeed, recent work in neo-pluralism accepts many of the criticisms from elitist and Marxist perspectives and attempts to ‘realistically’ describe the political process, with particular emphasis on stripping away out-dated aspects of pluralist thought and substituting it with multi-causal analysis (Dunleavy and O’Leary 1987: ch. 6). While recognising that such bleeding takes place, I nevertheless highlight their differences on the role of representation and the competence and autonomy of voters, both of which are highly relevant to my research.

2.1. Elites and non-elites

The key concepts and the main theoretical tenets of neo-elitism are not widely known, and it is worth summarising them here, if only very briefly (cf. Putnam 1976; Field and Higley 1980; Best and Higley 2010b).

First, the neo-elitists claim, after their classical predecessors, that in all societies of minimal organisation and complexity, power is distributed unequally and rests in the hands of elites. ‘Elite’ and ‘elites’ (plural) have traditionally referred to three different social entities: the upper social strata – ‘the cream of society’ – distinguished according to criteria such as status, wealth and income; the cultural establishment, typically accused of self-serving exclusiveness and arrogance; and, most importantly, the *key power-holders* typically defined as “small minorities who appear to play an exceptionally influential part in political and social affairs” (Parry 1969: 9; see also Bottomore 1993a: ch. 1; Putnam 1976: 2-8; Higley et al. 1979: 3; Pareto 1966: 248). While the popular meaning of the term still signifies all three entities, contemporary sociological analyses focus on the third one. Elites are defined as ‘ruling minorities’ – the most influential groups and individuals – the key decision-makers typically anchored in the largest organisations and at the apex of national power structures. Political elites comprise the political segment of elites: the key power holders at the top of governments, state apparatus and major parties. All other members of a society are seen as ‘non-elites’.

Second, the most important division in complex societies is between those people with significant and systematic political power – typically circumscribed as the political elite (or other similar terms) – and those who do not (called the ‘mass’ or ‘masses’). As Putnam (1976: 4) writes, this second tenet is not logically implied by the first, and it makes elite theory somewhat similar to Marxism. Elitists do not see power as gradationally distributed, but rather as relational or ‘polar’. Political elites and non-elites are paired concepts, though many neo-elitists embrace the notion of power gradation in the form of sub-elite strata.

Third, the political elite is organised and unified, though the forms and degrees of elite organisation and unity vary widely. In other words, elites meet Meisel’s (1958) ‘three C’s’ criteria of internal consciousness, coherence, and conspiracy (where ‘conspiracy’ is understood as a set of common intentions or will to action). Rather than being a mere “statistical artifact,” the political elite members “...know each other well, have similar backgrounds, and share similar values, loyalties and interests” (Putnam 1976: 4). This social cohesiveness allows the political elite to act to preserve their domination, especially when their interests and domination are threatened.

Fourth, like all elites, political elites are drawn from backgrounds of high status and high wealth, and are capable of controlling the selection of its members. The political elites tend to be less socially homogeneous and more mobile than other elite segments. Parry (1969: 33) stresses that elite survival can often hinge on admitting persons from diverse non-elite backgrounds to their ranks to respond to outside pressures, helping to add new talent and prevent the emergence of counter-elites. Pareto (1915[1963]) pays particular attention to this process in his theory of elite circulation and renewal. While mobility between the political elite and the masses can be quite intense, it rarely damages elite integration because it takes place through elite-controlled channels, or ‘selectorates’ (Putnam 1976; Pakulski 1982). Nevertheless it is never entirely complete or successful, and it regularly fails, resulting in periodic degeneration of elites, challenges by new (counter-) elites, and waves of elite succession. Weber (1968) described professionalisation of modern political elites, as well as the emergence of powerful governmental bureaucrats and party ‘directorates’. Modern elites are always affected by inevitable tensions between professional, bureaucratic-organisational and democratic-representational imperatives. Effective elites manage these tensions well;

ineffective elites decay into conflict-torn factionalism, surrender to charismatic leaders, or ossify into bureaucratic routines.

Fifth, the elite is essentially autonomous from the mass and not answerable to them for its decisions (Putnam 1976: 4). Even in democratic regimes, the elitists insist, political elites remain autonomous because they use a combination of persuasion, demagoguery, manipulation, threats, force, and fraud. Democracy, understood as direct governance by the people, is merely a political ‘formula’ (Mosca 1939) or ‘derivation’ (Pareto 1966) that justifies elite rule. However, democracy understood as a rule by open, competitive and publicly responsible political elites, is not only possible, but also spreading with political modernisation (Weber 1965; Sartori 1987; Pakulski 2012).

Sixth, elite theorists hold a sceptical view of non-elite capacities to organise, influence elites or formulate sensible political strategies. Mosca portrayed the masses as repositories of passions and unorganised desires (interests) that cannot enter the political realm without elite elaboration. Weber warned about populism (‘plebiscitary democracy’) inherent in modern politics, especially under pressure from charismatically-led mass movements. Mass members “are not organized for concerted political action. Instead each person tends to live his own private life, concentrating on his own private interests both in work and leisure” (Parry 1969: 54). The mass is considered an aggregate of individuals – a category of persons without a common purpose or method of communicating and deciding policy (Parry 1969: 37). Nevertheless, it is important to note that elite theorists do not view the masses as mere passive objects of elite manipulation. While the masses are *unorganised*, they are *structured* by various classes, status divisions, social movements and other material and ideal interests. In order to sustain their power, elites must forge alliances with these diverse segments of non-elites in order to prevent challenges from the mass. Moreover, non-elites often spawn organised groups of challengers (like the Bolsheviks on the eve of the Russian Revolution) who may take over political power and form new elites.

While discerning the key theoretical tenets of modern elitism (including neo-elitism), it is important to highlight numerous counterproductive confusions about elites and elitism shared by both political analysts and the lay public. These confusions and misunderstandings help to explain the eclipse of elitism’s popularity during a large portion of the twentieth century (Higley and Pakulski 2000[2012]).

2.1.1. *Confusions about elites and elitism*

The principal confusions are about the very concept of ‘elite’ – its meaning and deployments. Historically, the term *elite* referred to high-quality, exclusive, or the ‘best’ things, and was subsequently used to denote social groups claiming high status. This meaning has interfered with its technical use in political sociology. Indeed, Pareto contributed significantly to this problem, defining elites in two different ways in his *Treatise on General Sociology* (1915[1963]: 1422-4). In the first instance Pareto says that in every branch of human activity there is an ‘elite’ – the best lawyers, the highest earners, and so forth. He further divides this elite into a governing elite, “comprising individuals who directly or indirectly play some considerable part in government,” and a non-governing elite (Pareto 1915[1963]: 1423). Pareto thereby implies that the political elite is derivative of a larger and more general status group, the aristocracy, gaining its power from its status claims. This dual definition has resulted in numerous confusions.

The confusion has been continued in popular culture and mass media, where the term elite carries evaluative connotations of social exclusivity, haughty pretence and status usurpation – all seen as incompatible with the popular egalitarian ethos and democratic ideology. Thus in popular parlance, media usage, and sometimes in academic discourses, the term elite is accompanied by images of ‘chardonnay socialists’ or the ‘latte set’, of left-leaning, highly educated individuals juxtaposed with ‘the people’. In Australia, this misrepresentation manifests itself regularly in both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers and talkback radio. It suggests that political elites alienate themselves from real people, and that the university-educated elite has an ill-considered cosmopolitan agenda that is contemptuous of, and hostile to, the values of ordinary Australians (Hindess and Sawer 2007: 1-2).

There is also a confusing attempt at fusing the concepts ‘elite’ and ‘class’. This confusion was exacerbated by Mosca, whose *The Ruling Class* (1939) uses the titular term liberally, sometimes in a similar way to Marxist scholars (Parry 1969: 35-42). Yet Mosca stresses that it is small size and organisational superiority, and not control over economic resources (like capital), that forms the foundation of power in all societies, especially modern societies. This point is often ignored. Thus an extensive (and mostly critical) literature on emergent global corporate elites understands elites as mixtures of plutocrats, corporate executives, celebrities and top politicians, all seen as representing the underlying interests of global capital (c.f.

Rothkopf 2008; Robinson 2004; Robinson and Harris 2000). This is a serious confusion of two rival concepts and perspectives. For Marxists, economic classes – derived from one's relationship to the means of production – are central sources of social and political power. Political elites are understood as derivative of dominant classes, a conceptualisation best encapsulated by the phrase: "The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" (Marx and Engels 1977: 224). Elitism, on the other hand, "reverses Marxism's causal arrow" (Higley and Pakulski 2000[2012]: 321) by emphasizing autonomy of politics and importance of organisation (especially of the state) as a source of authoritative power. According to elitists, it is elite machinations and power games that are the driving force in politics. Moreover, it is elites who typically 'format' social structures from above. The resulting entities, such as nations, parties and classes, are the outcomes of elite appeals and political actions, rather than their structural causes (Pakulski 2005; Higley and Pakulski 2000[2012]: 321).

Another confusion concerns the elitist interpretation of modern democratic regimes. Elites exist in all societies, including the ones we classify as democracies, a point central to the work of both Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter (Pakulski 2012; Pakulski and Körösiényi 2012). They portray modern ruling minorities as embedded in the complex organisational apparatuses of the modern interventionist state and subjecting themselves to regular periodic competition for top executive and legislative positions. These elites are incumbents of complex, often bureaucratically organised, power positions. Modern political elites – the key component of broader societal power elites – are therefore open and mobile. They also exhibit high functional differentiation (c.f. Keller 1963), and include increasingly professionalised groups of politicians, officials of political parties (themselves bureaucratised), top state officials or 'mandarins', and powerful political leaders who emerge either from party organisation or from popular movements.

Weber and Schumpeter reconcile the elite perspective with modern representative (and liberal) democracy. While the relationship between democracy and bureaucratisation is described as tension-ridden, the two grow interdependent. Bureaucratisation is compatible with the democratic notion of fundamental equality of persons and "equality before the law" (Weber 1968: 983). It is also essential for sustaining social and political order that underlies democratic politics. Bureaucratised political parties – accompanied by professionalised politicians – are also more efficient than *notables* at administering resources and organising a

mass vote. On the other hand, bureaucratic administration under the control of a convincing and competent leader can more effectively dominate its subjects than other forms of administration. Bureaucratic administrators can displace professional politicians – and even subdue the powers of charismatic leaders – thus leading to political ossification. Nevertheless, Weber sees democratisation as inevitable and irresistible. It consists of subjecting the increasing number of public positions to elections, extending voting rights, preventing elite closure into an exclusive status group, and increasing impact of (mainly elite-shaped) ‘public opinion’. The net result is the increasingly professional, meritocratic and bureaucratic character of political elites. Electoral selection gives voters a sense of dignity, while successfully elected elites are given the autonomy necessary for consistent and responsible rule. From Weber’s elite perspective, democratisation does not remove elites, but merely changes their character and strategic location. Contemporary democratic elites are located in highly bureaucratised state executives, and increasingly placed there due to electoral mandates gained through the exercise of ‘oratory charisma’ (Pakulski 2012, Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012).

Similarly, Schumpeter (1942) has popularised the ‘procedural’ definition and accompanying ‘competitive’ theory of democracy as competitive selection of state executive leadership. Schumpeter takes aim at the ‘classical’ doctrine of democracy, wherein some Common Good is measured in the process of voting, and representatives are elected to carry it out (1942: 250). Individuals are considered to have little knowledge or interest in public affairs, and Schumpeter spends several pages questioning the ability of voters to rationally observe, interpret and judge political issues (1942: 256ff). The Common Good, he argues, must be more than an “indeterminate bundle of vague impulses loosely playing about given slogans and mistaken impressions” if it is to have any justifiable input into democratic politics (1942: 253). Like other elite theorists, Schumpeter sees public opinion as shaped and manufactured by elites, and thus not suitable as the sole basis for democratic government. Thus Schumpeter defines democracy as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (Schumpeter 1942: 269). Such a definition has several advantages. First, it provides efficient criteria for distinguishing democratic governments from others, while acknowledging that other forms of government can sometimes better serve the Common Good. Second, it leaves room for the immutable fact of leadership in democracy. Third, and

most importantly, it designates the electorate's function as *installing* a government, rather than effectively controlling it, or acting as one (Schumpeter 1942: 269-72).

Contemporary neo-elitists accept and respect this theoretical reconciliation between elites and democracy. They also continue efforts to uproot and correct the confusing and politically damaging misconceptions about elites, elite power and democracy. Perhaps the most important role in this campaign has been played by John Higley and his research associates, who formulated the theoretical foundations of neo-elitism.

2.1.2. *Consensual elites and liberal democracy*

Field and Higley (1980) and Higley and Burton (2006) argue that the elite configuration a society possesses cannot be predicted from its level of development. Instead, it is a product of historical contingencies and elite actions. Nevertheless, the specific configuration of elites has a powerful impact upon the stability of a society, as well as the emergent types of political regime. Elite *disunity* is the most common configuration, where mutually distrustful elites fight for power in no-holds-barred, often violent conflict. The political game under elite disunity is very high stakes – a poor decision or poor choice of factional alignment can often cost an elite member their life. Thus elite disunity is often characterised by political instability and frequent *coups d'état*. Higley and colleagues identify two further elite configurations: *ideological unified* and *consensual unified* elites. The former are tightly organised by an official 'ruling ideology', subscription to which dictates the flow of positions, privileges and patronage from other elite members. This configuration, exemplified by Soviet Russia, gains its stability by ruthlessly eliminating potential counter-elite groups. Once established, an ideological unified elite perpetuates itself due to stable and predictable rules of conduct. Violent seizures of power rarely occur under this arrangement because ideological dissent is strongly penalised and opposition crushed by the ruling elites' control of the state apparatus (Field and Higley 1980: 35-7). Consensual unified elites, on the other hand, are united by shared norms regulating political engagement ('rules of the game'). Consensual unified elites have no single ideology, and are instead characterised by:

[an] ability to shape and contain issues whose open and dogmatic expression would create disastrous conflict. This and this alone makes representative political institutions that are guided by reasonably competitive and influential elections possible, although not inevitable (Field and Higley 1980: 37).

In a consensual unified elite, the value of existing practices and institutions are taken for granted. In the give and take of political life, elites propose opposing policy positions that maintain this procedural core. Issues that threaten this procedural consensus, such as most radical and populist political programmes, are downplayed or removed completely from political discussion. Members of a consensual unified elite thus moderate conflict between non-elite groups and between themselves for the sake of political stability. As such, they do not expect to have their lives or livelihoods threatened by political conflict.

A consensual unified elite is uniquely compatible with liberal-democratic politics. The transfers of power in a consensual unified elite are regular, peaceful and predictable, usually following constitutional dictates. Any gaps in constitutional provisions are filled with implicit elite norms, which again emphasise non-violent conflict resolution. Field and Higley (1980: 117) are careful to emphasise, however, that it is consensual unified elites that are necessary for democratic politics, not the other way around. Historic elite settlements lead to long-term political stability, which allows for democratic institutions and practices to emerge. Should divisive and dangerous issues rise to public consciousness, however, “the tendency of non-elites is toward civil strife” (Field and Higley 1980: 117).

More recently, some neo-elitists have sought to draw further attention to the role of leadership in contemporary ‘elite democracy’ or ‘leader democracy’ (Higley and Pakulski 2008; Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012). They argue that the post-World War II era of ‘party democracy’ has given way, and that a form of leader democracy has been replacing it. Four key trends are responsible for this shift: (1) the de-alignment of parties and voters, and the decomposition of the ‘cleavage’ politics diagnosed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967); (2) the proliferation of the mass media and their increasingly intensive coverage of electoral politics; (3) continued centralisation of power within ‘core executives’; and (4) increased focus on international leaders as important actors in global politics. These neo-elitists draw particular analytic attention to national elections as a period where trust and confidence are invested in leaders. In this context, “publicity-hungry” leaders exist in a symbiosis with “news-hungry” media, who cater to “spectacle-hungry and image-sensitive” mass voters (Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012: 55). Media are a powerful but dangerous tool in the hands of leaders, as the strategic nature of electoral competition makes populist appeals an inviting prospect. The characteristic political process of leader democracy, therefore, is that of leaders gaining an electoral mandate through mass-mediated electoral contests.

As previously mentioned, neo-elitism emphasises the inevitability of elite rule. As a result, neo-elitists note that excessively ‘democratic’ or participatory approaches to politics are ill-advised, or even dangerous. Field and Higley (1980) assume that major social and political problems are intractable due to the absence of objective moral standards. Permanent solutions cannot be reached, only temporary (but often long-lasting) settlements to be maintained by elites. Field and Higley also argue that “...merely asking people what they want or what they think is right, which is the essence of the democratic process, is a useless endeavour that risks exacerbating conflict” (1980: 95). Democratic procedures must therefore always be tempered by elite autonomy from popular rule, and elite control of the political agenda.

The neo-elitist perspective is a unique and compelling approach to contemporary democracy. It is not a popular or well-known approach, partially due to the confusions discussed above. Nevertheless, an elitist approach is regularly used unwittingly by political commentators. Kelly (2009), for example, explains the transformation of Australia in the 1990s and 2000s by examining and comparing the personalities and political styles of Prime Ministers Paul Keating and John Howard.⁸ Likewise, political journalism regularly focuses on the machinations and factional wrangling of elites. This pervasive and unconscious use of elitist assumptions further justifies the systematic comparison of neo-elitism to its aggregative-pluralist competitor, to which I now turn.

2.2. The rival model: aggregative-pluralist

The ‘aggregative-pluralist’ model⁹ is more familiar to and more popular among political analysts than its neo-elitist rival. However, an overview of this perspective is necessary, mainly because the label ‘aggregative-pluralist’ covers a wide range of perspectives on contemporary politics and democracy. These perspectives share some important features that contrast with, and are missing from, the elitist perspective. More importantly, they can be synthesised into a single model and contrasted with neo-elitism.

⁸ One critical reviewer writes that Kelly’s (2009) book gives the “feeling that the Australian population was completely malleable through its insignificance to political decision-making” (Brownlee 2010). This both reflects the participatory sentiments of the reviewer and the elitist focus of the book.

⁹ This label is borrowed from Pakulski and Körösiényi (2012)

Pluralists recognise and promote social, institutional and ideological diversity, emphasising the merits of a political system with more than one source of authority. Pluralists draw on Madisonian assumptions about self-interested and power-maximising individuals, as well as Tocquevillian observations about the importance of voluntary associations for dispersing authority and providing civic education (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987: 14-16). Individuals naturally seek to maximise their own self-interest, and will group with others who share these interests in order to achieve them. This means that conflict in any minimally complex society is inevitable. These interest groups also constitute an empirical configuration of relatively dispersed power, wherein an eternal process of bargaining takes place (Held 2006: 160). This arrangement of competing and countervailing interest groups prevents any one social group from gaining too much power, and creates a stable equilibrium. When "one centre of power is set against another, power itself will be tamed, civilized, controlled and limited to decent human purposes" (Dahl 1967: 24). The state is understood as an aggregator or arbiter in this process, either reflecting the balance of demands placed upon it by interest groups, or acting as a judge in the conflict (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987: 43-9). Governmental decision-making therefore "involves the steady trade-off between, and appeasement of, the demands of relatively small groups, although by no means all interests are likely to be satisfied fully" (Held 2006: 161).

Within the aggregative-pluralist perspective, the state is generally understood as an arbiter or broker for the interest groups that seek to influence it. In the *weathervane* model, state actions and policies reflect the balance of pressure groups within society. State apparatus are understood as ciphers that channel interest group demands into policy. In the *neutral state* view, the state is understood as an arbiter ensuring that interest group competition is fair. The state, in this view, does not merely funnel interests, but actively balances, harmonises and mediates between them. In the *broker state* view, the state arbitrates between interest groups, but with the additional layer of self-interested groups from within the state apparatus, such as politicians and bureaucrats (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987: 43-8).

Perhaps the best way of presenting the general features of the aggregative-pluralist model-perspective is by briefly outlining its key components and the major theoretical contributions that shaped it.

2.2.1. Dahl's 'polyarchy'

Robert Dahl is an early and influential proponent of the pluralist perspective.¹⁰ His book *Who Governs?* (1961) is an early classic in the pluralist literature, and displays many of the approach's defining characteristics, such as a behaviourist and methodological individualist approach (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987: 17-20). Using a uni-dimensional theory of power – that is, that power can only be observed when exercised against the express wishes of others (Lukes 2005) – Dahl uses a case study to establish the predominantly *polyarchic* (plural-competitive) character of urban politics, versus an *oligarchic* (rule of the united few) counter-hypothesis. Dahl discovered that different groups were influential and successful in different policy areas, with final decisions in the hands of elected officials. This implied that power did not reside with a single or unaccountable group (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987: 19).

Dahl has also suggested that 'democracy' is a label that applies to regimes compatible with maximum feasible freedom and moral autonomy of those subject to collective decisions (Dahl 1989). The core democratic processes were no longer seen as carried out by an assembly of citizens, but performed by a *process of successive approximation*, wherein citizens determined broad ends and means of policy strategies during elections, as well as further narrowing them down via intra-election lobbying (1989: 336, emphasis in original). Thus active governments and organised citizens formed a plural democracy.

2.2.2. Lipset's 'cleavage politics'

While not conventionally falling under the pluralist banner, Lipset's (1981) aggregative sociology of democracy shares many characteristics with pluralist thought and gives it more historical depth and sociological substance. Material and ideal interests, in this view, are derived from the social structure, and major political parties represent multiple 'frozen' social-political divisions, or 'cleavages'. Their role consists of aggregating, reconciling and representing these plural (and incompatible) interests in the political arena:

For the sociologist, parties exert a double fascination. They help to crystallize and make explicit the conflicting interests, the latent strains and contrasts in the existing social structure, and they force subjects and citizens to ally themselves across structural cleavage lines and to set up priorities among their commitments to established or prospective roles in the system. Parties have an *expressive* function; they develop a rhetoric for the translation of contrasts in

¹⁰ Dahl's categorisation as a pluralist can be viewed as problematic, not least because of his 50-year publishing career. Dahl's focus on the way corporations impair democratic choices (Dahl 1982; 1985) could be categorised as neo-pluralist (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987: 278), and the notion of *polyarchy* (Dahl 1971) can be categorised as a democratic elitist position (Pateman 1970: 8-10; Higley, Deacon and Smart 1979: 218). Instead I use Dahl as an archetypal example of pluralist thought, in keeping with the emphasis on juxtaposition in this chapter.

the social and the cultural structure into demands and pressures for action or inaction. But they also have *instrumental* and *representative* functions: they force the spokesmen for the many contrasting interests and outlooks to strike bargains, to stagger demands, and to aggregate pressures....no party can hope to gain decisive influence on the affairs of a community without some willingness to cut across existing cleavages to establish common fronts with potential enemies and opponents. (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 5)

Parties thus represent political positions generated by key social cleavages, generated by the national and industrial revolutions: church *versus* government; subject *versus* dominant culture; primary *versus* secondary economy; and – most prominently – workers *versus* employers/owners (Lipset and Rokkan 1967).

The most important of these multiple cleavages is a class cleavage. Elections, as contested by parties, are a “democratic translation of the class struggle” (Lipset 1981: 230). The main empirical regularity behind this claim is that lower-income groups – or economically subordinate classes – vote for parties of the left, while high-income groups and economically dominant classes vote for parties of the right. Insecurity of income, unsatisfying work and unsatisfying status explain left-wing voting, and explain why leftist parties are instruments of redistributive social change. Deviation from this pattern was therefore attributed to various extremisms (Lipset 1981: 243-74).¹¹

In his updated edition of *Political Man* (1981), Lipset has acknowledged some complications in his cleavage theory. In advanced post-industrial societies, such as Australia, the centrality of class cleavages has waned. Post-industrial politics have become “increasingly concerned with noneconomic or social issues – a clean environment, a better culture, equal status for women and minorities, the quality of education, international relations, and a more permissive morality, particularly as affecting familial and sexual issues” (Lipset 1981: 509-10). For Lipset, this does not change the fundamental basis of politics, but rather, adds an additional layer of complexity to political interests by creating new cleavages. As such, “although the correlations have been greatly reduced...the classic political division of industrial society still predominates in determining political support” (Lipset 1981: 509-21; see also Clark and Lipset 2001).¹²

¹¹ In Lipset’s scheme, for example, poor people voting for conservative candidates might be explained by poverty so extreme that ignorance and illiteracy prevent effective leftist organisation, or a preponderance of traditionalistic values that do not render a low standard of living problematic (Lipset 1981: 273-4).

¹² Lipset’s cleavage theory underlies the Columbian and Michigan schools of political sociology, especially their ‘funnel model’ of political aggregation and voting (Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960; Lewis-Beck,

2.2.3. Downs's 'median voter'

The major contribution to the formulation and theoretical elaboration of the pluralist perspective was provided by Anthony Downs (1957) whose seminal study combined the highly rationalistic neo-classical economic approach with what was sometimes described as political realism. For Downs (1957), as for classical economists, voters are rational utility-maximising individuals. If a voter's expected utility from voting for party A is higher than for B, then they will vote for party A. Downs assumes that voters' political preferences are relatively fixed: "every citizen has a fixed conception of the good society and has already related it to his knowledge of party policies in a consistent manner. Therefore only new information can change his mind" (1957: 47). Voters' preferences are expressed in the form of votes, and as such, represent a 'package' of preferences, as well as an expectation of higher utility under the government of party A.

In such a system, the preferences of voters will be normally distributed on what is usually assumed to be a left-right spectrum of opinion. In an open competition, parties are therefore encouraged to tailor their policies to 'reflect' or 'mirror' the preferences of the *median voter*. In a stable two-party system, political competition has a centralising equilibrium that is analogous to the market process of supply and demand. Aside from large changes in the electorates' outlooks from major social upheavals or changes in suffrage laws, successful political campaigns and appeals predictably aim toward the median view. Downs's view of the democratic process is therefore *mechanistic* (Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012: 40).

Downs (1957: 11) explicitly assumes that the main goal of parties is election to power, meaning that policies are formulated opportunistically to win elections. While ideologies are useful intellectual shortcuts for voters, they serve as a drag on parties, hindering mobility when trying to approximate the median voter. The key consideration for parties is to resemble the median voter position while maintaining a semblance of ideological consistency to maintain continuity with past actions (Downs 1957: 98-113). Downs also notes that voters are often rationally motivated to abstain from voting. The opportunity costs of obtaining information, and the minimal difference between parties (especially under conditions of

Jacoby, Norpoth and Weisberg 2008; Miller and Shanks 1996). In this model, socio-demographic factors are at the mouth of the causal funnel, and help to channel citizens toward an eventual voting decision. Thus the socio-demographic factors influence (but do not determine) party identification, which influence (but do not determine) issue stances, which influence (but do not determine) candidate evaluations (Lewis-Beck et al 2008: 23).

median voter approximation), means that voting delivers little expected utility for many people. Voters must therefore pass a *party differential threshold* – that is, the expected difference in utility between voting for one party over another must be large enough – before they are motivated to stop abstaining (Downs 1957: 45-6). This is at odds with the notion of good citizenship that emanates from the republican tradition, and is one substantial point of disagreement between them. Downs in particular is sympathetic to the elitist notion that voters are poorly informed about political affairs. The difference between them is that, whereas elitist voter ignorance is ‘irrational’, based on disorganisation, emotional reactions, and susceptible to elite influence and manipulation, Downsian voter ignorance is regarded as rational and unlikely to change.

Work in the ‘spatial theory of voting’ has proliferated since Downs’s initial formulation, and has employed increased levels of mathematical sophistication (Enelow and Hinich 1984; Enelow and Hinich 1990). While they retain the assumptions of rationality and self-interest, Enelow and Hinich (1984) add an additional dimension of non-policy issues such as candidate personality, economic conditions, and international context. The addition of these non-policy issues can destabilise election contests, leading to non-equilibrium and non-moderate election outcomes (Enelow and Hinich 1984: 100). Nevertheless, being close to the centre of the electorate is a crucial factor in determining electoral success, but candidates cannot change this position at will – a candidate’s position is bestowed upon them by voters (Enelow and Hinich 1984: 221-2).

2.2.4. Page and Shapiro’s ‘rational public’

More recently, some scholars have accepted the notion of voter ignorance, but nevertheless maintain that the public as a whole has ‘real’ and ‘sensible’ political attitudes. Page and Shapiro (1992: 1, emphasis in original) argue that “...*collective* public opinion has properties quite different from those of the opinions of individual citizens, taken one at a time,” and that “...the American public, as a collectivity, holds a number of real, stable and sensible opinions about public policy and that these opinions develop and change in a reasonable fashion, responding to changing circumstances and to new information.” Page and Shapiro (1992: 15-6) also suggest that any individual’s policy preferences are neither perfectly informed nor perfectly random, and that new pieces of information push these attitudes back and forth in a manner that can appear as random ‘non-attitudes’. Nevertheless, individuals have a central tendency to their opinions that converge upon on *long-term preferences*. Most importantly,

individual random variations in opinions cancel one another out over a large sample, meaning that a large survey can measure the true, long-term collective preferences of citizens. Based on their analysis of 40 years of United States survey data, Page and Shapiro have also argued that collective public opinion responds sensibly to changes in the information available to citizens. For example, Americans quickly come to support the use of force in foreign affairs when national interests are threatened. They argue that:

...we see the American public as substantially capable of rational calculations about the merits of alternative public policies...even when public debate consists largely of outrageous nonsense, the public is surprisingly resistant to being fooled – so long as competing elites provide at least some alternative voices. The public mind is not simply a blank slate; it is not always easy to write upon (Page and Shapiro 1992: 381-2).

Despite individual citizens possessing few of the requirements for effective government, ‘public opinion’ possesses emergent properties that make it a reliable source of citizens’ collective views – a conclusion that has reinvigorated the pluralist perspective.

2.2.5. Justifying the aggregative-pluralist label

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, the label ‘aggregative-pluralist’ hides a wide variation of ideas and concepts. However, these theories share three important characteristics that justify a single label. First, voters are thought to have autonomous and fixed political preferences. ‘Fixed’ means that voters’ preferences are formed and cemented prior to engaging in the political process. Second, voters are by and large well-informed, especially on those issues that reflect directly on these preferences. Third, parties and other organised political groups and movements are seen to aggregate and chase these preferences, and engage in median voter approximation, as Downs (1957) suggests. Thus the approaches also share a ‘bottom-up’ logic (Körösenyi 2005: 363).

2.2.6. The deficiencies of deliberative democracy

Before I reduce the two theoretical models of democratic contest to ideal types, it is necessary to mention, albeit briefly, a third popular approach to democratic politics – that of ‘deliberative democracy’. It is difficult to describe deliberative democracy as a ‘model’ because it represents a predominantly normative approach to democracy that emphasises its ideological attractiveness, rather than descriptive accuracy. Its advocates emphasise the importance of public deliberation and reflection in the formation of the individual preferences that should decide policy. Deliberative democracy serves mainly as a tool of affirmation and advocacy, and not of description and testing. The essence of democratic politics is not voting,

aggregating interests, constitutionally-defined rights, or self-government but rather, the process of deliberation itself (Dryzek 2000: 1). For Offe and Preuss (1991: 170), deliberation can improve citizenship by “putting a premium on refined and reflective preferences, rather than ‘spontaneous’ and context-contingent ones.” Reflective preferences are:

...preferences that are the outcome of a conscious confrontation of one's own point of view with an opposing point of view, or of the multiplicity of viewpoints that the citizen, upon reflection, is likely to discover within his or her own self. Such reflectiveness may be facilitated by arrangements that overcome the monological seclusion of the act of voting in the voting booth by complementing this necessary mode of participation with more dialogical forms of making one's voice heard. (Offe and Preuss 1991: 170)

The model of deliberative democracy is strongly underpinned by a Habermasian (1976) understanding of rationality, where rationality is social – inseparable from the process of justifying oneself to others (Held 2006: 236). The emphasis of deliberative transformations, therefore, is not on increasing participation *per se*, but of designing and reforming institutions to induce deliberative decision-making on issues of collective concern. Most crucially, however, the deliberative project aims to achieve the ideal of democracy as self-rule by circumventing the problems of representation.

The deliberative model has been criticised as idealistic, impractical and – if treated as a description of actual political processes – as inaccurate (Kuyper and Laing 2010). One vital objection is that deliberative ideals are non-sociological: they disregard the tendency of humans to behave according to custom, emotion, and instinct. Ignoring Paretian and Freudian insights about the non-rational foundations of human conduct, deliberative democrats overestimate the extent to which individuals can conduct argument on rational grounds (Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012: 86). Instead, “it is persuasion and manipulation that prevails in public debates, even if carried out in a tolerant and egalitarian manner” (Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012: 84). Deliberative democracy’s normative and non-sociological character warrants its exclusion from this study.

2.3. The two models compared

As I have suggested, the neo-elitist and aggregative-pluralist models of democratic politics share some features, but also differ considerably, especially in their portrayal of the relationship between elites and voters. I highlight the most pertinent differences under three headings.

2.3.1. The direction of power-influence flows

This is arguably the major contrast between the two models. The advocates of the aggregative-pluralist model depict power and influence as flowing in a ‘bottom up’ direction. It is the voters – the views and concerns attributed to the median voter – that determine the agenda of electoral contests and the substance of political appeals by politicians. By contrast, neo-elitists portray the process as basically ‘top-down’. It is elites – the incumbents and the candidates – who shape the perceptions and views of voters. Voter views are diverse – mainly because of the competitive nature of elite persuasions – and change depending on the successes and failures of competing elite persuaders. Contestants who emerge successful are those who manage to secure the trust and confidence of voters, and who shape public views in the most effective way (Best and Higley 2010a).

2.3.2. The nature of political representation

In the aggregative-pluralist approach, ‘representation’ generally means the accurate mirroring of the composition of society by the Parliament and by elected officials (Körösényi 2005: 363).¹³ By mirroring the composition of society, the composition of interests is also mirrored, and therefore the social equilibrium reached by competing groups creates a political equilibrium. Implicit in this understanding is the notion that politics is not, or should not be, autonomous from society. As such, the aggregative-pluralist approach sees interests as channelled into the political process by interest organisations and parties and converted into the language of politics by representatives. This mathematical understanding treats representation as *responsiveness* to popular demands. In many cases, it is unclear what such a mechanistic understanding of representation calls for, such as when there is equal demand for two mutually self-defeating policies. Interests, furthermore, are generally narrow in scope. Accurately representing these interests will often leave representatives with little direction on the more arcane aspects of government (Körösényi 2005: 363-5; Pennock 1952: 791).

For elitists, representation is coded into the very role of politician or leader. They actively persuade voters and obtain a ‘mandate’ by gaining their confidence– and thus the right to claim representation and face electoral tests of its effectiveness. This is because the political process “is not generated by the political preferences of the electorate or by the interests of

¹³ Where I use ‘elitism’, Körösényi (2005) uses the label ‘leader democracy’.

social groups but rather by the aspirations and ambitions of politicians” (Schumpeter 1942: 263). Politicians, and especially leaders, are understood as entrepreneurs who create and mould preferences and expectations, rather than reacting to pre-existing demand. Political representation, therefore, is understood not as responsiveness but as *responsibility*, or accountability for actions. In the abstract sense, this involves politicians acting in what they believe to be the ‘best’ or ‘national’ interests of their constituents. In the practical sense, it means that politicians are subject to electoral approval and censure. Discharging this responsibility requires a degree of autonomy from the everyday demands of voters (Körösényi 2005: 364-8; Pakulski and Körösényi 2012: 24-5; Pennock 1952: 797).

2.3.3. *Voter competence and autonomy*

The assumptions made about voter awareness, interest and competence are highly important when evaluating government performance and the state of democracy (Körösényi 2010). Discovering that voters have low levels of political awareness and knowledge, or that this awareness is largely shaped by politicians (and the media) should not lead to a conclusion that democracy does not work. Instead, it should be – as Weber and Schumpeter originally suggested – a starting point for reflection about the nature of contemporary democracy.

Such reflection, as argued here, would pitch the two models against each other. The advocates of the aggregative-pluralist perspective see voters as aware, competent and autonomous. To the extent that pluralists have regarded politics as a process of interest aggregation, articulation and organisation, voters are supposed to be informed about politics, aware of their interests in a rational sense, and autonomous from leaders and parties (Held 2006: 159). Few contemporary aggregative-pluralists cling to the notion of omniscient and omnicompetent voters.¹⁴ Rather, they accept that voters monitor political issues that reflect upon their interests. This awareness and reflection are sufficient to assess leaders and parties. Nevertheless, this knowledge, and the political evaluations that flow from them, are understood to exist prior to interaction with (or manipulation by) leaders and parties. In other words, aggregative-pluralists expect voters to be aware, moderately competent and highly autonomous.

¹⁴ This is partially because the ‘classical’ theory of democracy, upon which aggregative pluralist approaches are supposedly based, does not exist (Pateman 1970: 14).

Neo-elitist scholars, by contrast, see voters – average or typical voters, that is – as possessing low awareness, competence and autonomy.¹⁵ Voters are understood to have general opinions and tendencies; elites are left to fill in the blanks. These features, however, do not prevent non-elites from forming supportive ‘social forces’ that provide valuable electoral support and thus cement elite power, and their modest level of competence is enough to retrospectively evaluate the performance of a government (Körösényi 2005; Pakulski and Körösényi 2012: 94; Field and Higley 1980: 19-20). Moreover, in the process of lending their vote to competing elite groups and factions, voters also gain a sense of dignity that legitimates elite democracy (see Pakulski 2012).

2.4. Conclusion

The main differences of the two models-perspectives are summarised in Table 2.1. Note that the two approaches are virtually mirror images of one another. It has to be stressed, though, that this contrast is at least partly exaggerated, and it is highlighted by the ideal-typical formatting of the models. Such formatting creates a continuum, with voter-centred aggregative-pluralist characteristics on one end, and elite- and leader-centred characteristics on the other. The continuum can be used in two ways. First, the results generated by my data will enable me to comment on the universal plausibility of the two perspectives, using Australia as a case study. Second, we can treat the two ends of the spectrum as configurations that Australian democracy could approximate. The results thus allow me to speculate on the conditions under which Australian politics and democracy could shift toward a more aggregative-pluralist model or toward a more elitist one.

¹⁵ The procedural definition of democracy used by neo-elitists is implicitly sceptical of the possibility of democracy in the sense of direct *self-rule* by citizens. While public opinion research as a whole is currently “schizophrenic” and unable to tell a unified story (Kuklinski and Peyton 2007: 61), researchers in Converse’s (1964) and Zaller’s (1992) tradition have found the competence of voters to be low/poor. Zaller (1992), for example, argues that voters do not carry fixed attitudes that can be extracted by researchers. Rather, they answer survey questions using information and ideas that are salient or on ‘the top of the head’. This salient information, in Zaller’s view comes predominantly from political elites through mass media (1992: 1-6). While partisan identification affects the character of these general opinions, its main effect is on which set of elites are more influential upon them.

Table 2.1. Key characteristics of the aggregative-pluralist and neo-elitist perspectives.

	Aggregative-pluralist	Neo-elitist
Democracy is...	Representation of collective will	Competitive leadership selection
Principal Actors	Rational individuals, interest groups	Politicians, leaders
Political process	Bargaining, interest aggregation	Persuasion, acquisition of support, shaping preferences
Representation	Quantitative, mechanical, responsive	Qualitative, personal, responsible
Direction of politics	Bottom-up	Top-down
Citizen preferences	Fixed, rational	Floating, amenable to persuasion
Citizens are...	Autonomous from leaders	Not autonomous from leaders
Leaders are...	Not autonomous from voters	Autonomous from voters

Source: Adapted from Körösiényi (2005).

In the next chapter, I explain the data and methods used to investigate the usefulness of these perspectives on contemporary democracy. Using quantitative analysis of Australian Election Studies data, and qualitative analysis of participants' commissioned political logs, I capture both the structure of elite-voter relations, and the dynamics of leader-voter interaction during the campaign prior to the Australian Federal election of 2010.

Chapter 3 - Data and Methods

In this chapter I formulate the research questions, describe the methods and innovative methodology used, justify my use of mixed methods and introduce the data used in my research. The observation of social-scientific concepts is indirect at best, and when evaluating two broad theoretical approaches this is exacerbated. I therefore use the complementary strengths of quantitative analysis of the Australian Election Study and its accompanying Australian Candidate Study, combined with qualitative analysis of political ‘logs’ commissioned during the 2010 Federal Election campaign, to better investigate the elitist and aggregative-pluralist approaches to democracy.

3.1. Research Questions

The central focus of this research is to address the following key question:

1. Which perspective is more plausible and which of the two models is more accurate – the *neo-elitist* or *aggregative-pluralist*?

The quantitative and qualitative parts of my research address more specific sub-questions:

Quantitative

1. How large are the political attitudinal distances between candidates (elites) and partisan voters?
2. How large are the political attitudinal distances between Labor and Coalition candidates (elites), and between Labor and Coalition voters?
3. Are candidates (elites) and voters closer or more distant on *competition* or *authority* issues?
4. How have the relationships between Labor and Coalition candidates (elites) changed between 1990 and 2010?

Qualitative

1. How politically aware are voters?
2. What level of political autonomy do voters possess?

3. What range of media sources do voters draw upon, and how does this reflect their awareness and autonomy?

As acknowledged in the introduction, the proposed research falls short of an empirical ‘critical test’ that would conclusively decide which perspective is more valid. However, it does provide some estimates that help in assessing relative plausibility and accuracy of competing models. While I reject an extreme Kuhnian (1996) view of the incommensurability of paradigmatic perspectives, I accept a moderate interpretation of the Kuhnian standpoint in the philosophy of science, wherein it is possible to partially assess the validity/accuracy of the models-perspectives in terms of overall ‘fit’ with the findings, interpretive consistency, and the ability to minimise anomalies. Such assessment, though, requires a careful conceptual and theoretical elaboration; above all, the synthetic modelling and polarised juxtaposition of the assessed perspectives. This was presented in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I report the indicators, describe the methods, and introduce the data that – taken together – allow me to make some judgement about the relative validity of the juxtaposed perspectives.

3.2. Research Approach

The goal of adjudicating between two competing perspectives is the reason I employed mixed methods in my research. Mixed methods research (MMR) is defined as “research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry” (Tashakkori and Creswell 2007: 4). While there are philosophical differences between quantitative and qualitative methods, mixed methods research is popular because the two are thought to have contrasting but complementary strengths (King, Keohane and Verba 1994; Neuman 2003: 16). Quantitative data “condense[s] data in order to see the big picture” (Ragin 1994, cited in Neuman 2003: 16). Specifically, quantitative research can: (i) accurately operationalise and measure specific constructs; (ii) conduct group comparisons; (iii) examine the strength of associations between variables; and (iv) specify and test research hypotheses (Castro, Kellison, Boyd and Kopak 2010: 342-3). Qualitative research on the other hand: (i) generates rich and detailed accounts of human experiences; and (ii) examines these accounts within their original context (Castro et al. 2010: 343).

It is risky to combine research methods simply because their strengths support one another. There must be a more robust justification for their deployment, based on their fit for the purpose. In this research, using mixed methods provides me with more than one opportunity to test the two approaches. As mentioned previously, there are no critical tests available to decide the superiority of either the neo-elitist or aggregative-pluralist account. Therefore, performing multiple indirect tests is preferable to performing one. Further, and more substantially, mixed methods research provides me with insight into the *structure* of elite-voter relations (surveys) and of their *dynamics* (political logs).

The survey analysis portion of my research focuses on the concept of *attitudinal distance* – that is, how far apart are candidates and voters on a range of political issues – and draws out several expectations from each approach about how elite and voter views are structured. In particular, I examine the neo-elitist expectation that elites polarise strongly on *competition* issues, such as taxation, redistribution, and the role of unions, but de-emphasise *authority* issues, such as reinstatement of the death penalty and whether lawbreakers should be given stiffer sentences.

Further, I examine these attitudes at three different points in time – 1990, 2001 and 2010 – which allows me to identify, and comment on, any long-term change that may have taken place. Overall, my survey analysis provides three ‘snapshots’ of elite-voter relations in Australia, and thus, three opportunities to apply the neo-elitist and aggregative-pluralist perspectives. This is a more reliable and insightful research strategy than McAllister’s (1991) original investigation that relied on a single data snapshot. It also allows me to examine whether elite-voter relations have changed during the last 20 years, contributing to debates about elite fragmentation and polarisation (e.g. Higley and Burton 2006; Hetherington 2009; Adams, Green and Milazzo 2012).

My analysis of the commissioned logs focuses on the concept of voter *autonomy*, that is, independence of voters’ views from elite persuasion (as reflected in media content). I examine the process of elite-voter interaction during the critical pre-election period: five weeks of official campaigning before the election and one week following the election. This intensive focus on the process of evaluation and decision-making allows me to better understand this process and to place it in the context of the elite-voter interaction established by my survey analysis.

3.3. Defining and selecting the political elite

In this research, I rely on Higley and Burton's definition of political elites as:

persons who are able, by virtue of their strategic position in powerful organizations and movements, to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially....Put most simply, elites are persons and groups who have the *organized capacity* to make real and continuing political trouble (Higley and Burton 2006: 7, emphasis in original).

This definition implies the *positional* method of elite identification, as contrasted with the *reputational* and *decisional* methods.¹⁶ I operationalise the Australian political elites more narrowly as *candidates for Federal political office* representing the two major parties (Labor and the Liberal/National Coalition). In the analysis of political logs, I concentrate on the *leaders* of the two major political parties – Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott.

Not all candidates are successful at winning election to political office, and thus do not enter the political elite. However, selecting only successful candidates would have left me with an unacceptably small number of cases.¹⁷ While successful candidates tend to be more centrist (and thus closer to voters) than their unsuccessful counterparts, these differences are relatively small. More generally, elite socialisation has a significant influence on political attitudes (McAllister 1991: 259-261). Given this use of a tighter definition of the political elite, any patterns of elite-mass difference found in my research are potentially even stronger than indicated.

It is acknowledged that there is no analysis of the Australian Greens – who are an increasingly powerful force in Australian politics, having captured almost 12 per cent of the national vote at the 2010 Federal election – in this research. An aggregative-pluralist

¹⁶ The reputational method involves asking relevant experts to name the most powerful individuals. The decisional method involves identifying the most powerful actors during the making of important decisions (see Hoffman-Lange 2007). These methods are intertwined with and reflect conceptual differences between elite researchers. Scholars using decisional and positional methods tend to see modern societies as essentially pluralist, whereas scholars using the reputational method are more likely to take a tightly integrated 'ruling class' or 'power elite' view (Hoffman-Lange 2007: 914), and therefore see true power as lying behind the scenes. The decisional method starts with the top position-holders within the formal structure of authority, who are regarded as the pinnacle of the elite. Researchers then descend the structure of authority to flesh out the rest of the elite. As will be clear, the major drawback with this approach is that there are no guidelines for designating the boundaries of the elite (Hoffman-Lange 2007: 913-4), which can be problematic in contemporary bureaucratised societies as the distribution of formal power is more or less continuous. Higley and Burton's definition is relatively inclusive, as any person or group from business, media, the governmental bureaucracy or elsewhere who uses their position in a powerful organisation to influence political outcomes can be defined as a member of the political elite.

¹⁷ For example, in the 2001 Australian Candidate Study there were N=76 successful Coalition and ALP candidates. Adding unsuccessful candidates raises the number of cases to N=173.

approach to contemporary democracy requires knowledge of the distribution of political opinion across the political spectrum to accurately estimate the position of the median voter. However, this is a minor problem for my research for three reasons. First, the Australian Greens only formed as a party in 1992, but entered individual candidates in the 1990 election, where they won two per cent of the national vote in the Senate, failing to win a seat. In the 2001 election they were more successful, capturing 5 per cent of the vote in the House of Representatives and the Senate, and winning two Senate seats. As such, the Green influence on the Australian political elite has been relatively minor until the 2010 election, where they helped to form minority government. Second, the Greens have had a greater effect on the political agenda than on governing or the process of winning elections. The pervasion of environmental issues, and climate change in particular, is testament to the influence of 'green' ideas. However, it is the major parties whose response to these issues is critical. Third, the influence of the Greens on electoral competition is captured more fully in the commissioned political logs.

3.4. Quantitative data and methodology

The first of the two pieces of research involves the quantitative analysis of elite and voter attitudes in the Australian Election Study and Australian Candidate Study. I have chosen three elections (1990, 2001 and 2010) with which to apply the aggregative-pluralist and neo-elitist approaches. Analysing three evenly-spaced elections allows for a stronger test of plausibility by ensuring that a single anomalous election or historical event does not distort my data. Moreover, a period of 20 years is approximately equal to a generation, meaning that a large proportion of candidates in the 1990 sample will have been replaced by 2010. Establishing an elite-mass structure across a 20-year time period thus allows me to argue that this pattern is trans-generational. Finally, I can glean additional insights from later datasets by looking for change over time, allowing me to engage with debates about contemporary elite fragmentation and polarisation (e.g. Higley and Burton 2006; Hetherington 2009; Adams, Green and Milazzo 2012). More information about the Australian Election Studies and Candidate Studies can be found in Appendix A.

This analysis is inspired by, but expands and improves upon, McAllister's (1991) analysis of elite and voter attitudes. McAllister sought to test three different explanations for attitudinal difference between elites and the mass public: classical democratic theory, democratic

elitism, and modern elite theory. Here, classical democratic theory, which places inherent value upon participation and civic education, anticipates that different education levels account for elite-voter differences in political attitudes. Democratic elitism (as derived from Schumpeter 1942; Almond and Verba 1989) anticipates that elite and voter attitudes cannot be bridged by education due to divergent levels of interest, information and organisation. Finally, modern elitism (derived from Higley and his collaborators) anticipates that elite consensus will prevent divisive issues from emerging on the political agenda, and that elite difference on issues that *do* reach the agenda will be greater than those that do not (McAllister 1991: 246).

While McAllister (1991) performed a range of analyses to examine these three approaches, it is his second-order factor analysis of elite and voter attitudes that interests me. Under the rubric of ‘modern elitism’ McAllister operationalised Higleyan neo-elitism by performing a second-order factor analysis of issue questions on the 1987 Australian Election Study. McAllister’s analysis of voters derived seven first-order factors: anti-trade-union, economic equality, economic incentive, environment, permissiveness, law enforcement, and women’s job opportunities.¹⁸ Among candidates, only three factors emerge from the same analysis, which McAllister (1991: 247; also Converse 1964) attributes to the high attitudinal constraint present among political elites. In his second-order analysis, factors relating to law enforcement and permissiveness loaded on an ‘authority’ dimension, and factors economic equality, environment, trade unionism, economic incentive, and women’s job opportunities loaded on the ‘left-right’ dimension. Labor and Coalition elites and voters were then plotted on this two-dimensional space to confirm the modern elitist proposition that elites polarise more on left-right issues than authority issues.¹⁹

I initially hoped to replicate this factor analysis for the quantitative portion of my research. However, intra-collection discontinuities made this impossible. Of the 19 questions

¹⁸ The following questions loaded on the seven first-order factors: *Anti-trade-union*: trade unions have too much power; stricter laws to regulate unions; unions act for their own good; *economic equality*: income and wealth should be redistributed; reduce poverty; give workers more say at work; *economic incentive*: reduce taxation rather than increase social services; high taxation is a disincentive to work; too many people rely on government handouts; *environment*: do not mine uranium; protect environment; Aboriginal land rights have gone too far; *permissiveness*: women should be able to obtain abortion easily; nudity and sex in media have gone too far; marijuana should be decriminalised; *law enforcement*: give police more power; stiffer sentences for law breakers; *women’s job opportunities*: job opportunities for women are better than men; women’s equal opportunities have gone too far.

¹⁹ McAllister (1991: 265) used a principal components analysis with varimax rotation.

McAllister used from the 1987 Election Study, only 11 remained in 2010. Crucially, there were very few generic questions on economic policy, and no repeated questions on the environment. While the factors emerging from the initial analysis make theoretical sense, the second-order analysis produced factors that were not theoretically meaningful and were strongly biased toward the first factor.²⁰ Given these limitations with the data, factor analysis was abandoned, and a more parsimonious analytical approach adopted that retains the *attitudinal distance* factor analysis portrays.

3.4.1. Linear regression

In this research I use linear regression to estimate the attitudinal distance between candidates and voters, adjusting for age, sex, and tertiary education. I argue this is a sensible decision to aid interpretation, as well as methodologically defensible. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression requires the outcome variable to be interval or ratio, but my outcome variables are Likert-type attitudinal questions. A technically correct analysis may use ordinal regression, which estimates the *probability* of belonging to a category of the dependent variable, as opposed to estimating the *value* of the dependent variable (Field 2009: 266). While more conceptually sound for categorical data, logistic models are more difficult to interpret than linear models. The relevant statistic here is the *odds ratio*, which is an “indicator of the change in odds resulting from a unit change in the predictor” (Field 2009: 270). For example, if self-identifying as working class (vs. middle/upper class) made you twice as likely to vote for Labor, this would be expressed as an odds ratio of 2. In ordinal regression, the difficulty of interpretation is further increased. Ordinal regression uses a *cumulative probability* model (Agresti and Findlay 1997: 600), where the model estimates the log odds of a score of 1 versus scores higher than 1, the log odds of a score of 2 versus scores higher than 2, and so on.

Further, the use of linear regression in the analysis of Likert-style dependent variables is methodologically sound. Carifio (1972a, cited in Carifio and Perla 2007; 1972b, cited in Carifio and Perla 2007) has demonstrated that Likert-type questions have a high correlation to a response format that asks respondents to place their attitude anywhere on a 100mm line. This implies that the Likert response format can closely approximate interval-level data, making linear regression a suitable analytical technique. More generally, parametric tests

²⁰ The rotated factors from the first- and second-order factor analysis are presented in Tables 7.5 and 7.6 in Appendix E.

such as the F-test are highly robust to violations of their assumptions (Glass, Peckham and Sanders 1972, cited in Carifio and Perla 2008: 1150).²¹ While these points demonstrate the suitability of linear regression to my analysis, I conducted an assortment of ordinal models to ensure that the results from each methodology matched. A selection of ordinal models can be found in Appendix C.

3.4.2. *Selection of variables*

Using McAllister's (1991) factor analysis, the issues of the incentive effect of high taxation; whether wealth should be redistributed; whether trade unions have too much power; and whether unions should be more strictly regulated were theoretically selected as representative of left-right or *competition* issues from the 11 questions consistent between surveys.²² Issues of marijuana legalisation; the reinstatement of the death penalty; whether law breakers should be given stiffer sentences; and sex and nudity in the media were selected as proxies for divisive or *authority* issues.²³ The questions were originally scored from 1 to 5, but have been rescored from 0 to 100 for ease of interpretation.

- *Competition issues*
 - Taxes
 - Redistribution
 - Union power
 - Union regulation
- *Authority issues*
 - Marijuana legalisation
 - Reintroduction of death penalty
 - Stiffer sentences
 - Sex and nudity in media

²¹ The exception here was the assumption of homogeneity of variance, but Carifio and Perla (2008: 1150) say that "violations of this assumption must truly be extreme before they bias the F-test."

²² The questions for these variables are worded: "High income tax makes people less willing to work hard" (1 = Strongly Agree; 5 = Strongly Disagree); "Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary working people" (1 = Strongly Agree; 5 = Strongly Disagree); "The trade unions in this country have too much power" (1 = Strongly Agree; 5 = Strongly Disagree); "There should be stricter laws to regulate the activities of trade unions" (1 = Strongly Agree; 5 = Strongly Disagree).

²³ The questions for these variables are worded: "The smoking of marijuana should NOT be a criminal offence" (1 = Strongly Agree; 5 = Strongly Disagree); "The death penalty should be reintroduced for murder" (1 = Strongly Agree; 5 = Strongly Disagree); "People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences" (1 = Strongly Agree; 5 = Strongly Disagree); "[...please say whether you think the change has gone too far, not gone far enough, or is about right?] The right to show nudity and sex in films and magazines" (1 = Gone much too far; 5 = Not gone nearly far enough).

Following this, I performed three sets of analysis, corresponding to three dimensions of the data under investigation:

- *Intra-status* analysis: Labor and Coalition voters are compared, and Labor and Coalition candidates are compared. Each of the eight attitude questions in each year forms a dependent variable, which is regressed upon party identification, with age, sex and education as control variables. Results in this section are expressed as *inter-coefficient distances*, or the distance between the two groups on the attitude (ranging from 0-100);
- *Intra-party* analysis: Labor voters are compared with Labor candidates, and Coalition voters with Coalition candidates. Results are expressed as *inter-coefficient distances*;
- *Temporal* analysis: Each subgroup's (Labor voters, Labor candidates, Coalition voters, Coalition candidates) scores are compared with previous sampled years to examine whether their attitudes have undergone statistically significant change. Results are expressed as raw means (out of 100) to give a better sense of where the groups are positioned.

3.4.3. Control variables

A set of three control variables – age (specified in years), sex (male/female) and education (tertiary degree or higher) – were added to the intra-status and intra-party analyses to reinforce their rigour. There are two important reasons for this. First, the three variables represent key socio-demographic variables that can explain political attitudes. Tertiary education has a substantial and diffuse effect on political attitudes, while older people and males tend to be more politically conservative (Truett 1993; Pratto, Stallworth and Sidanius 1997). McAllister (1998) has also shown that the young, people with low levels of educational attainment, those born outside the country, and women (especially those involved in household duties) have lower levels of political knowledge. Second, classical democratic theory holds that any difference in elite attitudes can be explained by their greater levels of education (McAllister 1991: 240). Establishing patterns of elite-mass difference after adjusting for levels of education would further reinforce the elitist case.

3.5. Qualitative data and methodology

The qualitative portion of my research is concerned with the views of non-elites – the Australian voters. In particular, I wished to examine in detail the changing patterns of voters' perceptions and evaluations of the electoral contest during the five weeks of official campaigning. Are these patterns more compatible with highly-informed, autonomous voters, as the aggregative-pluralist model suggests? Or are they more compatible with the neo-elitist account, which depicts voters as poorly-informed and non-autonomous?

The qualitative segment of this research is made up of two matched parts: (1) The analysis of commissioned political logs from participants over a six-week period; and (2) The collection and categorisation of political leader statements in major newspapers during the same period.

The political views of Australians have been analysed in a similar way by Brett and Moran (2006). In their interviews with 75 Australians, Brett and Moran (2006: 302) found that most participants were keen to disavow interest in mainstream politics, finding the pushiness and self-display of politicians embarrassing. Participants frequently described themselves as 'ordinary', 'middle class', or 'middle of the road' people. Moreover, respondents' understandings of politics were "grounded in pragmatic, commonsense individualism" where people are seen to be largely responsible for their own lives, and questions about collectivities are answered using individuals (Brett and Moran 2006: 326). In keeping with these themes, their participants expressed a de-politicised understanding of freedom, where people are understood to be free to go about their daily lives, rather than free from arbitrary governmental interference. Indeed, this understanding is such that participants often conflated Australia as a large country and as a place of personal and political freedom (2006: 117).

While Brett and Moran's (2006) research is useful in foreshadowing everyday Australian understandings of politics, it is not methodologically informative for my research. The interview format of their data collection contrasts strongly with the logs I used (described in more detail below). Moreover, their research did not focus on electoral competition as an important component of contemporary democracy. While citizens may indeed avow little interest in politics most of the time, the reality of compulsory voting in Australia forces them to pay, at least, a minimal amount of attention during the electoral period.

In this research, I tried something new and innovative. Political ‘logs’, a form of commissioned diary, have no known precedent in political sociology or political science.²⁴ Logs are a hybrid between a small panel survey and a series of structured interviews, and as such have several distinct advantages. Critically, they allowed me to gain a sense of dynamism that could not be achieved with the use of survey data. Because they resemble diaries, the logs also encouraged thoughtful and reflexive responses free from the potential interactional distortions of interviews.

This qualitative approach also sidesteps one of the potential drawbacks with political knowledge questions. Lupia (2006) argues that judgements of citizen competence based on political knowledge questions such as the names of particular political incumbents, or the role of a political position, reflect a worldview in which journalists and political researchers have a valid professional interest. However, it is not at all clear that this sort of knowledge – or the broader knowledge the questions are proxies for – are prerequisites for competent political decision-making. My subjective, qualitative assessment method partially circumvents this problem. While the assessment criteria used here resemble these political knowledge questions by privileging policy issues over superficial judgements of character, a qualitative assessment nevertheless allows participants to describe their evaluations and rationalisations in their own words. By separating the concept of political autonomy from that of political awareness, it becomes possible that voters with low levels of knowledge of the political system can still form political judgements independently from leaders and parties.

The commissioned political logs completed by my participants are a form of solicited diary. Diaries are a qualitative research methodology wherein the researcher employs qualitative analysis techniques to personal diaries kept by their participants. There are two fundamental forms of diaries: (i) *unsolicited*, where the participant has kept a diary for private use and has granted the researcher access; and (ii) *solicited*, where the participant keeps a diary that is expressly designed for the researcher’s purposes (Jacelon and Imperio 2005: 991-2). While an accepted research technique throughout fields using qualitative research, diaries are especially widespread in health research to track patient experiences (Day and Thatcher 2009: 249).

²⁴ Studies of voting behaviour in the United States rely almost exclusively on survey research and experimental methods (Niemi, Weisberg and Kimball 2011).

Diaries have a number of attractive features as a research tool (Day and Thatcher 2009: 250). Most importantly, the diary keeper gives the researcher a personal insight into their opinions, reactions and rationalisations. Diaries privilege thoughtful reflection in an environment isolated from the researcher, which is a strong contrast to the immediate answers required by the interpersonal interview setting. This premium on reflection can help to avoid culturally expected or standard responses, although it should be borne in mind that solicited diaries cannot be regarded as naturalistic observations. Diaries are also flexible, allowing participants to complete entries soon after important events. This minimises the need for retrospective recall, helping to enhance the reliability of their account.

One of the limitations in the diary methodology is the difficulty in controlling the length and quality of entries (Day and Thatcher 2009: 250). A diary is not structured data collection like a survey, nor is there an opportunity to prompt for more information as in an interview. As such, researchers can expect wide variation in the length and quality of diary entries, both within and between participants.

Overall, the hybrid nature of the logs provided me with an interesting mix of data. Where normally a qualitative interviewer would be guided by an *aide memoire*, log questions were set in advance and standardised. The questions were left open to interpretation, with the opportunity for the researcher to request further comments or clarification during the debriefing interview. Therefore they should be seen as a research technique of a mostly qualitative nature, as the open-ended questions prevent the use of sophisticated statistical procedures. However, due to the structured and repeated questions in the logs, the answers lend themselves to some rudimentary quantitative content analysis. While the data is structured enough to allow simple counting procedures and analyses of distribution and proportion, the nature of most answers encourage the use of qualitative-interpretive and content analysis that are typically used in the analysis of interview and focus group data. There are other advantages that derive from utilising this hybrid approach in my research:

- The repetition of questions allows for lower investments of time to maintain longer-term projects – in my case, collecting six weeks of data from sixteen participants rarely required more than emailing the questions each week.

- While conformity to the structure configuration of the questions is encouraged, deviation is not as problematic as in survey data.²⁵ This prevents the problem of missing data that afflicts survey research.
- Crucially, logs encourage more thoughtful and reflexive responses than surveys, focus groups and interviews. Respondents had a week to consider and write each log, and complete them in a comfortable environment away from the researcher. There is no pressure exerted by the presence of interviewer and more freedom and autonomy to consider a response. Such responses, therefore, should be less affected by interactional and cultural distortions.

These points are important because my key intention was to get a more detailed and reliable picture of voters' perceptions than those provided by standard methods. Moreover, I wanted to capture the evolution of the political views of voters during the critical decision-making period, before and during an election. The logs are therefore most valuable as a supplement to standard survey data. They help to triangulate research findings, confirming them by using different research methods.

3.5.1. Design and administration

Participants for the logs were recruited by convenience sampling a range of university networks. I addressed undergraduate-level sociology and economics courses, as well as a meeting of the local branch of the University of the Third Age, explaining that I was interested in their views on the political campaign. An advertisement for participants was also posted to the University's Staff news page and Current Students page. Participants were selected for variety on the basis of gender, age, political identification, and political interest, and are thus not representative of the Australian voting population. The selection was designed to give a sense of variation in the form and substance of political views, but not necessarily in the proportions they constitute in the electorate. Most importantly, I aimed to select participants articulate enough to write 350 words on politics on a weekly basis – thus the focus on university sources.

²⁵ This situation arose in my research. One of my participants had trouble sending their logs in the required format, and stopped directly answering the questions in subsequent weeks. However, this did not prevent me from performing any form of analysis on their logs.

Ethics approval was sought and gained from the University of Tasmania's Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (project code H11235). Participants were given an Information Sheet describing the purpose of the research and signed a Consent Form indicating their willingness to participate. They were assured of confidentiality and that all data would be ethically stored. Participants were offered reimbursement for their time and effort, conditional on completion of all six logs and a final debriefing interview.²⁶

Each participant was asked to write six weekly logs answering four repeated questions concerning their perceptions of political candidates, issues, sources of information and general political evaluations. While the logs were structured by the questions, the candidates were free to provide not just answers, but also broader commentaries that justified their answers. The logs covered the five weeks of official campaigning after the announcement of the election, and one week following the election (see Table 3.1 below). Participants were emailed the questions for the week on the Wednesday, with responses due the following Sunday. While participants were able to complete their diaries whenever they wished, in practice most participants completed them on the Sunday.

Table 3.1. Participant log and electoral event dates.

	Log due date	Campaign events
Week 1	25 July	Election announcement (17 August)
Week 2	1 August	
Week 3	8 August	
Week 4	15 August	
Week 5	22 August	Polling day (21 August)
Week 6	29 August	

A set of four core questions were repeated in each of the six logs. These were: what do you consider the most important issues; who signalled these issues; who has the best solutions to these issues and why; and how well did each of the leaders perform during the last week. Two additional questions were asked in the first week of the campaign – one asked the participants about their voting intentions, the other for their opinion regarding the replacement of Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister by Julia Gillard. The fifth week contained an additional question asking how the participants voted (or intended to vote).

²⁶ During the selection process and administration of the logs, the intention to compare their logs with the statements of political leaders was withheld from participants. It was anticipated that participants may deliberately avoid statements by leaders, or deliberately contradict them, in order to appear well-informed and independent.

Following the completion of the logs, participants were given a debriefing interview. The debriefing interview was used as an opportunity to confirm with the respondent the overall direction of any opinion change, ask for clarification of any sections of the logs that are ambiguous, and debrief the participant regarding the nature of the study. The log questions, participant information sheets, consent forms, and debriefing interview schedule are available in Appendix D.²⁷

3.5.2. *Qualitative log analysis*

The analysis of the logs took place in two main parts: a qualitative analysis of key themes in the logs and an *agenda originality* test between participants and leaders (detailed below).

I conducted a thematic analysis with a particular focus on the concepts of *political awareness* and *political autonomy*. Political awareness refers to the level of sophistication the participant displays when discussing political issues. I used the following criteria to assess political awareness:

- Whether the participant can *identify* political issues (rather than other more ‘superficial’ elements of the campaign such as personalities or styles);
- Whether the participant provides *details* when discussing issues, actions and policies – e.g., the cost of the National Broadband Network, what year(s) it will be rolled out, and in what areas;
- Whether the participant provides *reasons* for liking/disliking an issue, action or policy;
- Whether the participant is able to estimate the *effect* of an issue or policy, or how policies might interact.

Political autonomy, on the other hand, refers to the source of this political awareness. The following criteria were used:

²⁷ The fourth regular question asked: “How well do you think the following leaders have performed over the last week? [0 = Not well at all; 10 = Very well; 11 = No info]”. This question did not relate to any of the key conceptual differences between the two approaches being evaluated, and was thus added without a proper rationale. It was not used in subsequent analysis.

- Whether the participant's identification of political issues is independent of political leaders and parties;
- Whether the participant's evaluation of political issues is independent of political leaders and parties.

Beyond this, my analysis was inductive in that it was sensitive to emerging patterns and themes that were not anticipated.

3.5.3. Agenda originality analysis

In addition to the qualitative analysis of the political awareness and autonomy of participants, I measured the extent to which the political issue agendas of participants and leaders overlapped during the campaign ('agenda originality'). This was undertaken to examine whether the participants' choice of the most important issues was independent of media coverage of leaders. This is critical when trying to ascertain whether leaders or voters are the dynamic element of the political process.

The agendas of the political leaders – Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott – were ascertained by sampling their quotes and paraphrases from three daily newspapers across the six weeks of the campaign. *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* were sampled every second day of the period beginning on Monday 19 July; *The Age* was sampled every second day beginning on Tuesday 20 July. Each quote or direct paraphrase of a leader was classified by its political topic.²⁸ Participants were asked each week to list a maximum of two issues that they considered important. These issues were then categorised in the same manner as those of leaders.

For leaders, the agenda for each week was determined by calculating the quotes and paraphrases from each topic as a proportion of all quotes from that week.²⁹ The participants' agenda was determined by calculating each topic's share of the total topic mentions.³⁰ For

²⁸ A direct paraphrase refers to when the article paraphrases the leader's words and uses the word "said" in the sentence. For example, "Mr Abbott said Labor had failed to lead on climate change and had overspent during the global financial crisis, prompting waste and mismanagement," is a direct paraphrase, but "Mr Abbott attacked the government for its wasteful spending," is not.

²⁹ For example, there were 192 phrases by leaders in Week 1, 61 of which were on Population and Immigration (32%).

³⁰ For example, 5 participants mentioned climate change as an important topic in Week 1. Participants designated 31 important topics, meaning climate change constituted 16% of the participant agenda.

each topic, the participants' topic share is subtracted from the leaders' topic share, creating an agenda difference for each topic. Agenda topics whose share was below 5% for both groups were excluded. The sum of these differences was then halved to create an *agenda originality* figure, where 0% denotes that leader and participant agendas are completely identical, and 100% denotes that the agendas are completely different.³¹ A fully worked example from Week 1 of the study period is available in Appendix B.

3.6. Potential Problems

There are a number of minor potential problems with my research that I will address before presenting the analysis. One minor problem is that the units of analysis between leaders and participants are different – for leaders the unit of analysis is the phrase, while for participants it is the elected issue (maximum of two). It is important to note, however, that the relationship between leaders and voters is also asymmetrical. Leaders interact with voters as a pair of individuals, whereas voters interact with leaders as a group. It is therefore defensible to extract the leader agenda from quotes in media and the participant agenda from the chosen issues of the group as a whole.

A second potential problem is with the selection of media sources. This study did not engage in an analysis of television coverage of political events as it would have added little value. Because the focus is on quotes from political leaders, and not the agenda-setting and framing effects of media outlets, virtually all of the same quotes will be present in newspaper articles as on television bulletins. Using newspapers alone thus results in very similar data without the added complexity of analysing visual, real-time media. Using television as a data source may instead prove rewarding for future research.

Further, my choice of *authority* issues may be unreliable outside of the Australian context. For example, the use of the death penalty question would probably be unsuitable in the United States because capital punishment is practiced in some states and is subject to considerable debate. This example illustrates that it is unlikely that researchers could construct a universal set of issues that measure elite consensus in comparative perspective. However, it is important to note that in the Higleyan formulation of elite consensus, elites contain and suppress those particular issues whose open and dogmatic expression would result in political conflict (Field and Higley 1980: 37); it is natural for these issues to vary

³¹ The sum of agenda differences is calculated using absolute values.

between countries and between political cultures. Because the political cultures of democracies can vary markedly, it makes sense that the *authority* issues within that democracy also vary.

Finally it is important to note that any evidence for the existence of an elite conflict resolution consensus is necessarily indirect. It would be difficult to examine an implicit consensus between ordinary citizens, as it must be interpolated from the absence of certain kinds of conflict. This difficulty becomes a virtual impossibility when we seek implicit consensus among the political elite, whose activities are often intentionally hidden from the public (let alone nosy researchers). Here it is important to restate that my selection of *authority* issues is drawn from McAllister's (1991) factor analysis of Australian elite and voter attitudes. The issues of sex and nudity in the media, and the legalisation of marijuana were drawn from the first-order 'permissiveness' dimension, and the issue of stiffer sentences for lawbreakers was drawn from the first-order 'law enforcement' dimension. While the death penalty question is omitted in McAllister's analysis, it is unclear why, as it seems like a prime candidate to be included as a question of law enforcement. Together, these questions relate to elite procedural consensus because of their relation to governmental authority: their focus is upon attitudes toward maintaining social order and 'proper' moral behaviour through state action.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methods and methodologies used and data collected in my research. The project rests upon the combination of the quantitative analysis of Australian Election Studies and Candidates Studies with the qualitative analysis of commissioned participant logs. This approach opens multiple opportunities for analysing both the structure and the dynamics of elite-voter relations.

The next two chapters present the results of my analyses: first, of the survey data, and then of the political logs.

Chapter 4 - Results from quantitative analysis of candidate-voter attitudes, 1990-2010

Representative democracies, such as Australia, hold regular electoral contests to decide who will represent the voters of electoral districts, and, more broadly, who will symbolically represent citizens in the political sphere. During each election, politicians – almost invariably preselected by and organised in political parties headed by a leader – inform citizens of their positions and policies in a strategic competition for votes. Inevitably, this information is accompanied by persuasion. Politicians actively canvass votes by presenting themselves as the best speakers for the interests of their constituents and the entire nation, as well as the proponents of the most appropriate political strategies.

How are these elections won? It is recognised that these elections are not faithful re-enactments of constitutional rules and electoral procedures; they are not re-enactments of party platforms (on the part of candidates) and structurally-derived interests and traditional party loyalties (on the part of the median voter). The process is more messy and contingent, subject to the games and manoeuvres of key political actors. The social-scientific account of this process, I argue, can be reduced to two general models derived from two quite different understandings and explanations of political processes: the aggregative-pluralist and neo-elitist.

In this chapter I juxtapose these two models-perspectives and assess their relative plausibility. Plausibility refers to the degree of ‘fit’ with the empirical data, as well as the ability to highlight the most striking features of the process under analysis. The aggregative-pluralist approach, for example, depicts power-information flows as taking a ‘bottom-up’ direction. It has little to say about the active role of political candidates in canvassing votes and persuading voters, or about the ways voters’ views are structured *en masse*. Neo-elitism, by contrast, portrays the power-information flows as directed ‘top-down’. It pays less attention to how the views of non-elites are (independently) structured. Both models and accounts present differing pictures of the voter and elite (candidate) views, the structure of these views, and the dynamics of interaction between the two. Before assessing the plausibility and accuracy of these two accounts, I will briefly recap their key elements.

4.0.1. *Aggregative-pluralism*

The popular understanding of democracy as the ‘rule of the people’ is difficult to associate with particular academic authors. It is a mix between republicanism, with its emphasis on self-government and active citizenship, and liberalism, with its emphasis on individual rights derived from citizenship, and the circumscription of state power (Held 1996, chs. 2 and 3). While early modern thinkers such as Rousseau refer to the ‘General Will’, this level of abstraction is unhelpful when trying to translate implicit understandings into concrete expectations about a given set of data, as in this chapter. Instead, I use the more contemporary and elaborated accounts of Downs (1957), Dahl (1956, 1989) and to some extent Lipset (1981) to represent the *aggregative-pluralist* approach to democracy (as labelled by Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012).

For Downs (1957), the best known exponent and advocate of the *aggregative-pluralist* model, politicians ‘reflect’ or ‘mirror’ the preferences of the median voter in order to maximise their electoral success. Voters, in turn, are rational utility-maximising individuals with exogenous preferences. Voters express these policy preferences at elections, where officials organised into parties freely compete for their vote. This open competition encourages parties to tailor their appeals to the *median voter* to maximise their prospects for winning office. This view of the democratic process is *mechanistic* because successful political campaigns and appeals predictably aim toward the median view (Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012: 40). Downs (1957: 11) explicitly assumes that the main goal of parties is election to power, meaning that policies are formulated opportunistically to win elections. Ideologies are useful intellectual shortcuts for voters, but serve as a drag on parties, hindering mobility when trying to approximate the median voter. In this view the key for parties is to resemble the median voter position while maintaining a semblance of ideological consistency to maintain continuity with past actions (1957: 98-113).

For pluralists like Dahl (1956, 1989) and scholars of cleavage politics like Lipset (1981), interests and preferences derive from social groups and the social structure as a whole. Well-functioning democratic institutions balance the demands of these competing groups, whose interests are organised into bodies such as NGOs and parties. Pluralists cling less tightly to the notion of rational voters (Dahl 1989: 88), as parties play a key role in aggregating and articulating interests, and simplifying political choice at the ballot box (Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012: 89). Despite holding differing assumptions from Downs (1957) about the

origins of preferences, they are still exogenous to the competitive electoral process, and thus the game of median voter approximation is still the key to winning elections.

4.0.2. *Neo-elitism*

Neo-elitism portrays politics as power games between competing elites. Political elites play a major role in those games, and they actively but competitively shape the views of voters. Political outcomes, including political institutions and practices such as democracy, are seen as elite accomplishments. Neo-elitism attributes differences in political outcomes, including types of regime emerging from elite power games as products of variations in the structure of national elites, especially political elites. In their competition for votes and executive positions, these elites competitively shape issue agendas. Neo-elitism rests on the premise that ruling partisan elites de-emphasise or downplay certain issues that could be highly divisive or destabilising if debated. Elites “guide and direct” how and when political issues are raised, to prevent these issues from becoming divisive (Field and Higley 1980: 118). Elites therefore perform three important tasks: (i) manage potentially divisive *authority* issues by controlling the political agenda and the manner in which they are discussed; (ii) debate acceptable or *competition* issues through a mixture of debate, bargaining and coercion; and (iii) uphold and maintain respect for established political institutions and conflict resolution procedures. For Field and Higley, the key feature of elite-mass relations is not correspondence of views or simplistic demographic representation of the electorate, but the mediation and transformation of political conflict. Elites are guardians of democratic norms and procedures, rather than aberrations (Dye and Zeigler 1970).³²

4.1. Testing the plausibility of two models

My research follows the strategy used by McAllister (1991), but also expands the survey analysis and supplements it with a complementary investigation of voters’ views. I have chosen three elections (1990, 2001 and 2010) to assess the plausibility of the competing models. Analysing three evenly-spaced elections allows for a stronger test of plausibility by

³² Early United States studies (e.g. Converse 1964, Stouffer 1955, McClosky 1964, Prothro and Grigg 1960) detailed the poorly informed state of the American public and the comparatively high level of sophistication and organisation of political elites, as well as higher levels of political tolerance than voters (Peffley and Rorschneider 2007: 68). This tolerance was explained by socialisation into the give-and-take of democratic politics through continued exposure, as well as recruitment from the most privileged socio-economic strata. Reviewing more recent studies, Peffley and Rorschneider (2007: 71) argue that elite socialisation toward tolerance may only lead to a “sober second thought” when the threat from dissident groups is below a certain threshold, and that the elite-mass gap in tolerance shrinks considerably when elites perceive a high level of threat. “We may not assume,” they argue, “without any systematic empirical study, that elites even in mature democracies are consensually unified behind the democratic creed.” (Peffley and Rorschneider 2007: 74).

ensuring that a single anomalous time-point does not distort the findings. Moreover, a period of 20 years is approximately equal to a generation, meaning that a large proportion of candidates in the 1990 sample will have been replaced by 2010. Establishing an elite-mass structure across a 20-year time period will thus allow me to argue that this pattern is trans-generational. Moreover, such a broad coverage enables me to study change, and to engage debates about elite fragmentation and polarisation (e.g. Higley and Burton 2006, Hetherington 2009, Adams, Green and Milazzo 2012).

Measures of attitudinal distance can easily be created using linear regression models, providing that the operationalisation of the variables is theoretically justified. Based on McAllister's (1991) factor analysis, four issues – issues of the incentive effect of high taxation, whether wealth should be redistributed, whether trade unions have too much power, and whether unions should be more strictly regulated – were selected as representative of left-right or *competition* issues. Four issues – marijuana legalisation, the reinstatement of the death penalty, whether law breakers should be given stiffer sentences, and sex and nudity in the media – were selected as proxies for *authority* or 'divisive' issues. The responses were originally scored from 1 to 5, but have been rescored from 0 to 100 for ease of interpretation (where 0 indicates "Strongly Agree" and 100 indicates "Strongly Disagree").

Following this, I performed three sets of analysis, corresponding to three dimensions of the data under investigation:

- *Intra-status* analysis: Labor and Coalition voters are compared, and Labor and Coalition candidates are compared. Each of the eight attitude questions in each year forms a dependent variable, which is regressed upon party identification, with age, sex and education as control variables.
- *Intra-party* analysis: Labor voters are compared with Labor candidates, and Coalition voters with Coalition candidates.
- *Temporal* analysis: Each subgroup's (Labor voters, Labor candidates, Coalition voters, Coalition candidates) scores are compared with previous sampled years to examine whether their attitudes have undergone statistically significant change.

The figures I present in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 represent differences between the regression estimates (that is, non-standardised regression coefficients).³³

There are several advantages to linear regression analysis, such as the ability to tabulate the information in multiple dimensions. The analyses presented in this chapter focus on both the intrastatus (elite-elite and voter-voter) and the intraparty (ALP elite-voter and Coalition elite-voter) comparisons, allowing a much more fine-grained analysis to be conducted. Here elite *competition* polarisation is compared with *authority* polarisation, elite *competition* polarisation with voter *competition* polarisation, and so on. Moreover, linear regression also allows for the use of control variables such as age, sex, and education, as well as the use of inferential statistics, to examine the significance of the differences. Overall, this approach offers the opportunity for a detailed analysis of the structure of elite-mass relations, and, combined with three surveys over a 20-year period, allows examination of the dynamics – rather than just the structure – of elite-mass relations.

4.2. Theoretical expectations

The expectations from the competing theoretical approaches must first be furnished, as they decide the meaning of potential findings. Neo-elitism predicts that political elites will exhibit greater polarisation on *competition* issues – where elites can safely and vociferously disagree in the normal give-and-take of electoral politics – and lesser polarisation on *authority* issues, symptomatic of elite consensus.³⁴ Aggregative-pluralists, by contrast, would not expect any differences in issue structuring. One implication of the *median voter hypothesis* is that, in the process of attempting to approximate the median voter, candidates will tend to adopt attitudinal positions closer to each other than their respective voters. This expectation also reflects the aggregative-pluralist emphasis on overt bargaining and compromise between interests. There is an important ambiguity here between the attitudinal positions of candidates

³³ For example, in Appendix F, ALP vs. Coalition voters have a difference of -22.1 on the redistribution attitude, meaning the estimate for Labor voters is 22 per cent lower than Coalition voters. For more information, please refer to the Data and Methods chapter.

³⁴ There is an important ambiguity here in translating this theoretical insight into an empirical prediction. If elites are seen to downplay controversial issues, does this mean they are less attitudinally polarised in comparison to voter attitudes on *authority* issues, or less attitudinally polarised in comparison to *elite* attitudes on *competition* issues? The correct interpretation is unclear, but the decision is relatively consequential. In his investigation of elite and voter attitudes in Australia, McAllister mostly uses the first interpretation (1991: 244; 254). A casual re-examination of the evidence provided by McAllister suggests that elites polarise more strongly on all issues (including authority) than do voters. However, this polarisation is attenuated by reduced intra-elite variation on the authority dimension compared to the competition dimension (McAllister 1991: 254-5).

and the electoral platforms of their respective parties. One could reasonably surmise that it is the parties' electoral platforms that matter most when voters are attempting to make up their mind. This point will be discussed in more detail in the concluding sections. For now, I present the aggregative-pluralist expectations in terms of candidate positions, as this will facilitate the formulation of a contrasting 'null hypothesis'. The two sets of expectations are contrasted below:

Neo-elitism

1. For candidates, attitudinal distances for *competition* issues will be greater than attitudinal distances for *authority* issues;
2. *Competition* attitudinal distances for candidates will be greater than *competition* attitudinal distances for voters;
3. Candidates as a whole will possess more 'liberal' positions on *authority* issues than will voters;

Aggregation-pluralism

1. *Competition* attitudinal distances for candidates will be smaller than *competition* attitudinal distances for voters;
2. The party closest to the mean voter view on *competition* issues in each election will be the victorious party;
3. Net of education, political elites do not possess substantially different attitudes to those of voters.

4.3. Elite and voter polarisation

Figure 4.1 presents the average inter-coefficient distances between partisan candidates and partisan voters on *competition* and *authority* issues. These average distances are presented for ease of interpretation, and are calculated from Figures 4.2 and 4.3. While the average distances are not tested for statistical significance, all individual inter-coefficient distances in the figures are significant at $p < .001$ (using t-tests) unless otherwise noted. It is also important to note that 'voters' is shorthand for non-elite Labor and Coalition identifiers drawn from the Australian Election Studies, and does not necessarily mean that they voted for their identified party. I use party identification because it is a relatively stable and powerful form of social

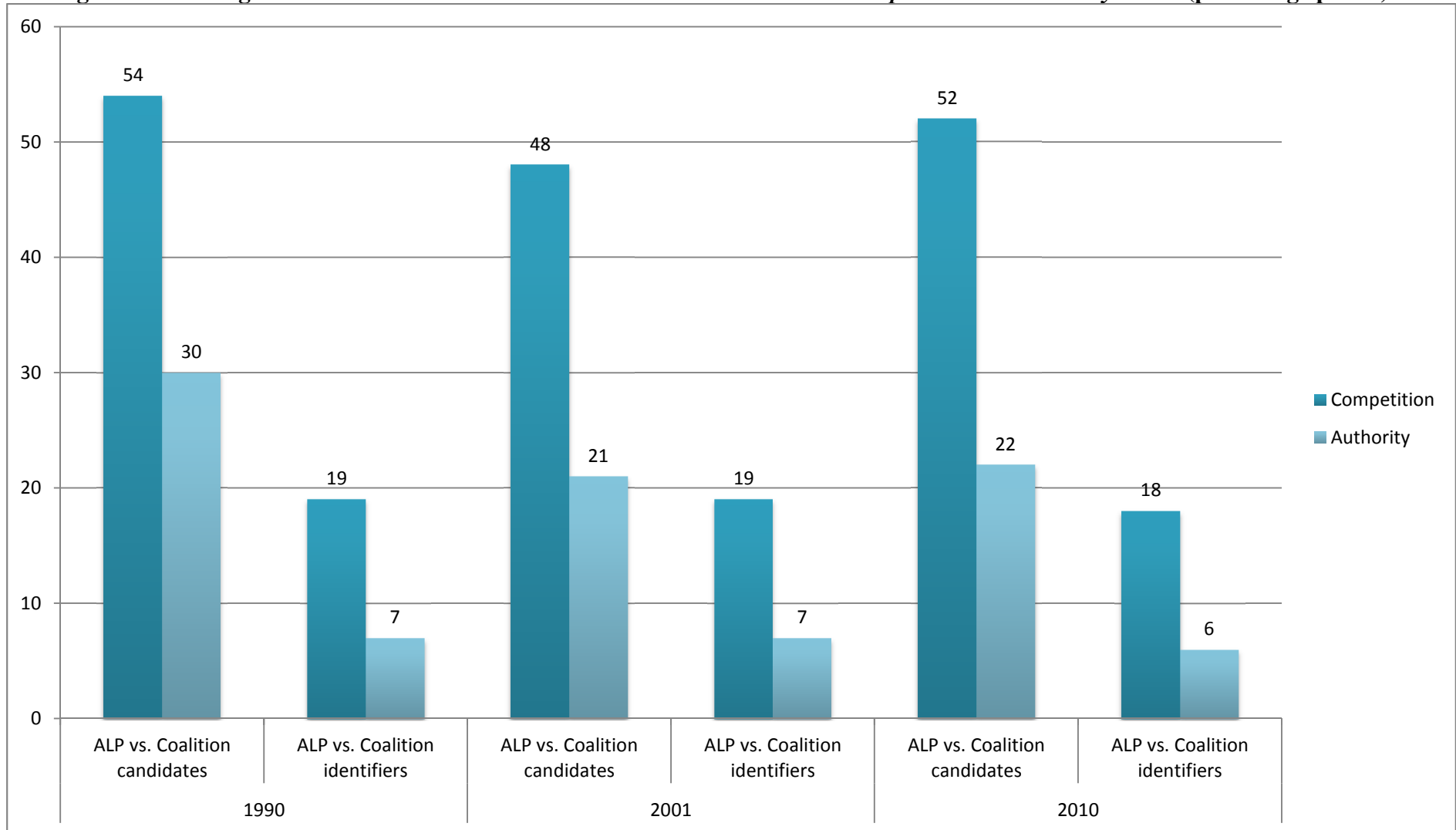
identification that tends to outlive policy and leader evaluation, and even voting (Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002). The data used to generate figures 4.1 and 4.2 are also presented in Appendix F.

The thrust of Figure 4.1 supports the neo-elitist approach to contemporary democratic politics. Most importantly, candidates polarise more strongly on *competition* issues than *authority* issues. In 2010, ALP and Coalition candidates are an average of 52 percentage points apart on *competition* issues, compared with 22 percentage points for *authority* issues. This pattern is repeated in the 2001 and 1990 results thus indicating stability and consistency.

Elites polarise more than voters on *competition* issues, offering clear strategic differentiation. These issue polarisations act as ‘cues’ – decision-making heuristics – to voters, helping to account for the shortfall in knowledge possessed by the democratic citizen which is required by normative theories of democracy (Gilens and Murakawa 2002). In the broadest terms, these results confirm Putnam’s (1976) observations on the structure of elite-mass relations. Elites are more partisan and more ideologically consistent than voters, and their policy preferences more divergent and more closely tied to their party identification than voters. Elite-voter opinion in liberal democracies thus forms a V shape.

The V of elite-voter opinion therefore has two additional dimensions not explored by Putnam (1976): candidate *competition* differences form a second V with candidate *authority* differences; and candidate *authority* differences form a third V with voter *authority* differences. Importantly, this pattern is present in all three sampled years. Some apparent variations in the inter-coefficient differences in 1990 and 2010 will be examined in a later section.

Figure 4.1. Average inter-coefficient distances for candidates and voters on *competition* and *authority* issues (percentage points).



Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

These results support the neo-elitist model. While elites disagree on *authority* issues to a greater extent than voters, their disagreement is of a much smaller magnitude than their disagreement on issues of everyday political debate – as predicted and expected by neo-elitist scholars.

The results also demonstrate that voter attitudes are less tightly organised by partisan identification than are the attitudes of elites. This resonates with the sober assessments of voter attitudes by many public opinion researchers (e.g. Lippmann 1922; Zaller 1992). For Zaller (1992: 1), the indirect access to political reality that most citizens are afforded, combined with varying levels of attention and interest, means that most citizens do not carry fixed attitudes, but tend to construct their opinion ‘on the fly’ based on ideas and information that is most salient to them. While partisan identification is a powerful filter, the attitudes that result from this filter are not fixed. Instead, each domain of politics is one in which citizens create attitudes based on the ideas that have reached them and that they have found acceptable (Zaller 1992: 2). In this light, the absence of visible cues on *authority* issues leaves voters without a vital source of information, and leaves voter opinion in its default, disorganised state.

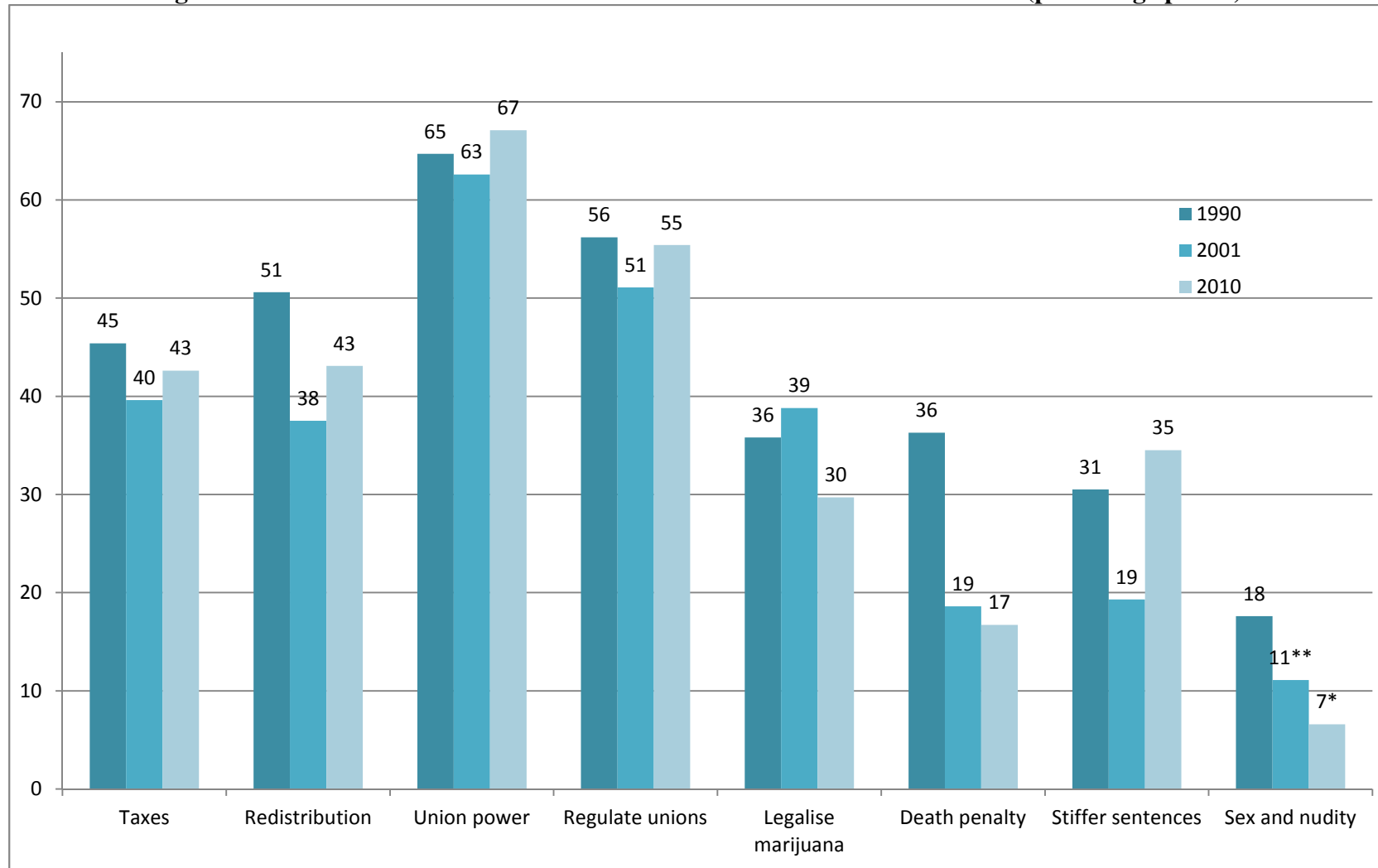
These conditions of authority de-polarisation indicate a high level of inter-elite trust and adherence to the peaceable ‘rules of the game’ symptomatic of a *consensual unified elite*, as described by Higley and his colleagues. A consensual unified elite is a stable elite structure that does not depend on ideological unity and enforcement of approved opinion, but rather on implicit agreement upon the rules of the game – the rules under which the creation of national policy occurs. “Rival persons in this kind of structure,” Higley and colleagues (1979: 11) write, “apparently moderate their quarrels and rivalries voluntarily in accordance with an underlying consensus and unity. Although they take clearly divergent positions on public matters, they observe a tradition of political contest, and they adhere to a set of usually unwritten rules of political conduct.” Under these conditions, elites do not expect to be heavily penalised for losing political contests, which makes the state immune to simplistic power seizures that are common under elite disunity (1979: 11). Elites agree on these implicit rules and procedures “because it is fundamentally their game” (Putnam 1976: 116). Such agreement, therefore, is symptomatic of a consensual unified elite structure that is uniquely compatible with representative democratic politics.

In the Australian case presented here, the consensual unified elite generates a non-elite (voter) issue-structure which is similar in character. Non-elites polarised on *competition* issues to a greater extent than on issues of *authority* and permissiveness. However, the magnitude of this polarisation in 1990 was less than half the size of the respective gap between partisan elites, and is even smaller in 2001 and 2010. Further, voters as a group appeared less tolerant and permissive than elites, a finding that is particularly strong on issues of law and order. These results are consistent with the sober descriptions of the masses by both classical and neo-elitists (e.g., Parry 1969: 37, Field and Higley 1980: 19-20).

There are several interesting features of Figures 4.2 and 4.3 that bear mentioning here. The first is that voters polarised relatively little on the issue of taxation – a maximum of 12 percentage points in 1990 ($p < .001$), and only 5 percentage points in 2010 ($p < .001$; Figure 4.3). This is slightly anomalous given its designation as a *competition* issue, as this categorisation implies that the level of taxation should be commonly debated by elites, and therefore voters should be exposed to polarising elite cues. Instead, I speculate that Australia's utilitarian political culture (Collins 1985; Hancock 1931: 72-3) means that the question of taxation is not infused with the same moral sentiment that it is in countries like the United States. Instead, conflict over the level of state spending is more likely to be prevalent, hence the higher levels of voter polarisation over the question of redistribution.

Second, the issue of sex and nudity produced the least polarisation among elites: the candidates were 18 percentage points apart in 1990 ($p < .001$) and only 7 percentage points apart in 2010 ($p < .05$; Figure 4.2). This suggests that this question has disappeared from the agenda of partisan debate during the last 20 years. A potential reason for this is that the ubiquity of electronic media, especially the internet, has made it difficult to consider effective regulation. This is unlikely, though, as the Labor government in 2008 proposed a mandatory internet filter to prevent citizens from downloading illegal content such as child pornography and terrorist materials (Foley 2008).

Figure 4.2. Inter-coefficient distances between ALP and Coalition candidates (percentage points).



Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; (n.s.) not significant; all other figures $p < .001$.

4.3.1. Evaluating aggregative-pluralism

While the results in Figure 4.1 do not constitute a decisive blow to the aggregative-pluralist approach, they cannot be explained by this model. In Kuhnian language, they constitute a puzzling anomaly. According to Downs (1957), candidates should attempt to mirror the position of the median voter, a process which is clearly *not* taking place. Wherever the median voter position falls among *competition* issues, highly polarised elite views are not indicative of what Downsian pluralists would call *centralising equilibrium*.

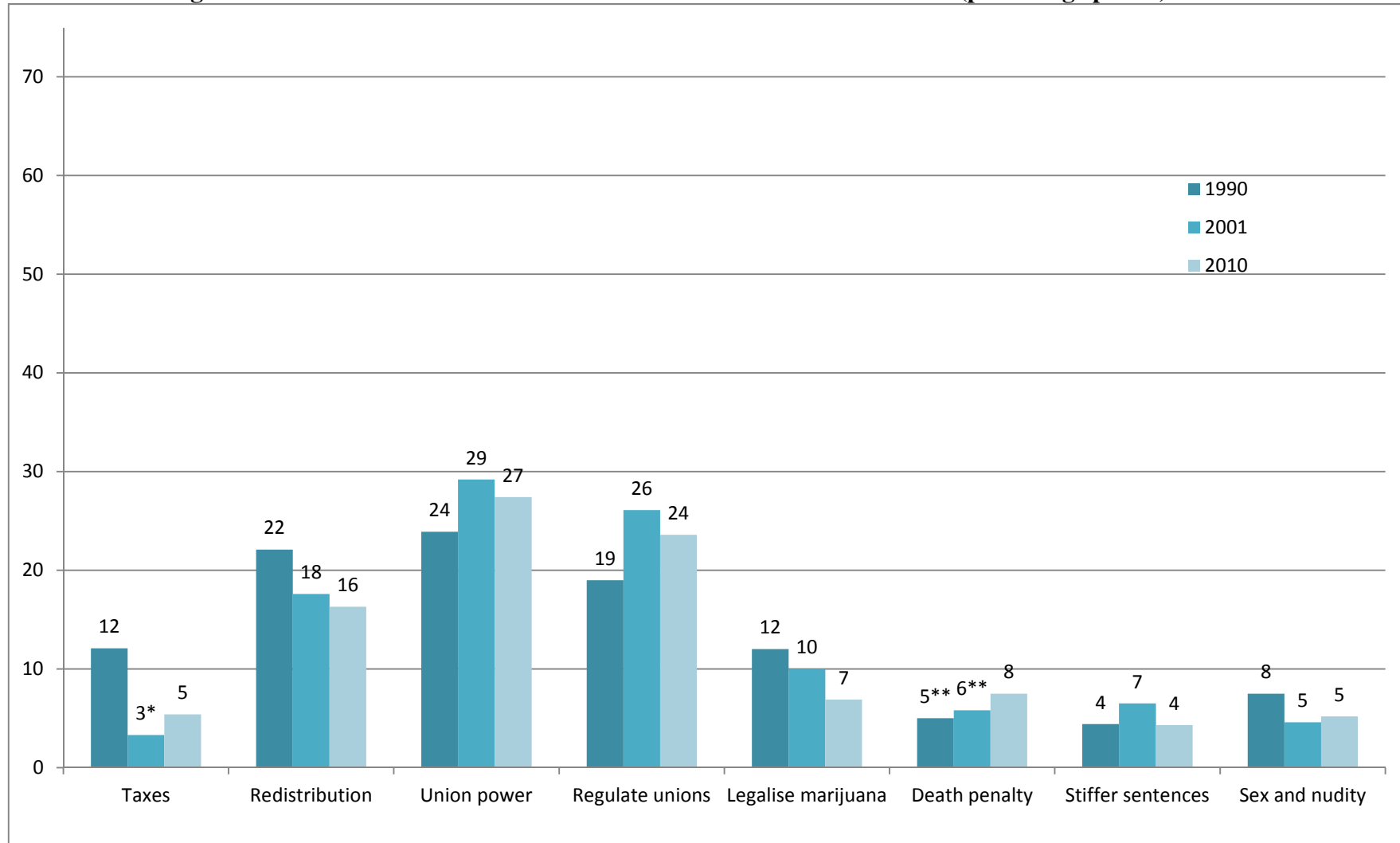
This is a somewhat uncharitable interpretation because it does not account for the mediating role of the political parties. Downs (1957) sees parties as the entities that contest elections, and thus as the entities whose positions should be close to the median voter. The private views of candidates, as expressed in the Candidate Survey, may differ widely from the publicly pronounced party positions. After all, it is the party's policies and pronouncements which are used to capture votes and win elections. The candidate views in the survey may not be an accurate depiction of the party platform as a whole, and thus they may not accurately reflect parties' attempts to win votes.

While some variation within a party is normal (hence the existence of factions), the process of elite recruitment and socialisation ensures that candidates are aligned with the majority of the party's platform. Further, a desire to avoid cognitive dissonance should prevent candidates whose views differ widely from their party from running for Parliament. In short, the views of candidates that constitute the party are, in aggregate, a reasonable approximation of the party's position.

Nevertheless, I briefly investigated this view to see whether it was relevant. In Table 4.4 I present the self-placement of candidates and partisan voters on an 11-point scale, candidates' and voters' placements of the parties, and candidates' placements of their electorates, from all available years (these data were not available for 1990). Candidate placement of their parties was only available in 2010. Pairs of Labor and Coalition means were subjected to independent t-tests, except for all voters' views of the parties, which were tested using paired-samples t-tests.³⁵

³⁵ "In politics, people sometimes talk about the 'left' and the 'right'. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?"; AES: "Using the same scale, where would you place each of the Federal political parties?"; ACS 2001, 2010: "And where would you place the political views of your electorate on this scale?"; ACS 2010: "And where would you place your party on this scale?".

Figure 4.3. Inter-coefficient distances between ALP and Coalition voters (percentage points)



Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

*p<.05; **p<.01; (n.s.) not significant; all other figures p<.001.

Results indicate that voters place the Labor party at 4.2 in 2010 ($p < .001$), and voters who identify with Labor place themselves at approximately the same level. However, Labor candidates place themselves at 3.3 ($p < .001$). This gap is repeated and even widened in 2001. This suggests that in the case of Labor, the private views of candidates differ substantially from how the voters place the party.

Table 4.4. Mean candidate and voter left-right placements.

	Labor	Coalition
	2010	
Voter self placement	4.3***	6.2***
All voters' view of party	4.2***	6.2***
Candidate self placement	3.3***	6.6***
Candidate placement of party	4.5***	7.2***
Candidate placement of electorate	5.8 (n.s.)	5.7 (n.s.)
	2001	
Voter self placement	4.5***	6.3***
All voters' view of party	4.6***	6.5***
Candidate self placement	3.2***	6.6***
Candidate placement of party	--	--
Candidate placement of electorate	6.2(n.s.)	6.0(n.s.)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007).

However, the case for Coalition candidates is much weaker. In 2010, the general electorate places the Coalition at 6.2 ($p < .001$), and Coalition-identifying voters place themselves at the same level ($p < .001$). Coalition candidates place themselves at 6.6 ($p < .001$), a difference of less than half that of Labor candidates and voters. This gap is slightly smaller in 2001.

Together, these figures are contradictory evidence about the value of candidate attitudes as a proxy for the party's position. Labor candidates are relatively distant from voters' impressions of the party, whereas Coalition candidates are relatively close. One minor mitigating factor is that successful candidates tend to be slightly more centrist than their unsuccessful counterparts (McAllister 1991: 259-261). If there were a large enough number of successful candidates to be used as a sample for my research, the difference between politicians and voters would likely be smaller than is depicted in Table 4.4. Overall, the

argument that surveying candidate attitudes does not account for the mediating role of the parties holds some relevance, but the effect is small.

4.4. Elite-Mass relations: Comparing the Parties

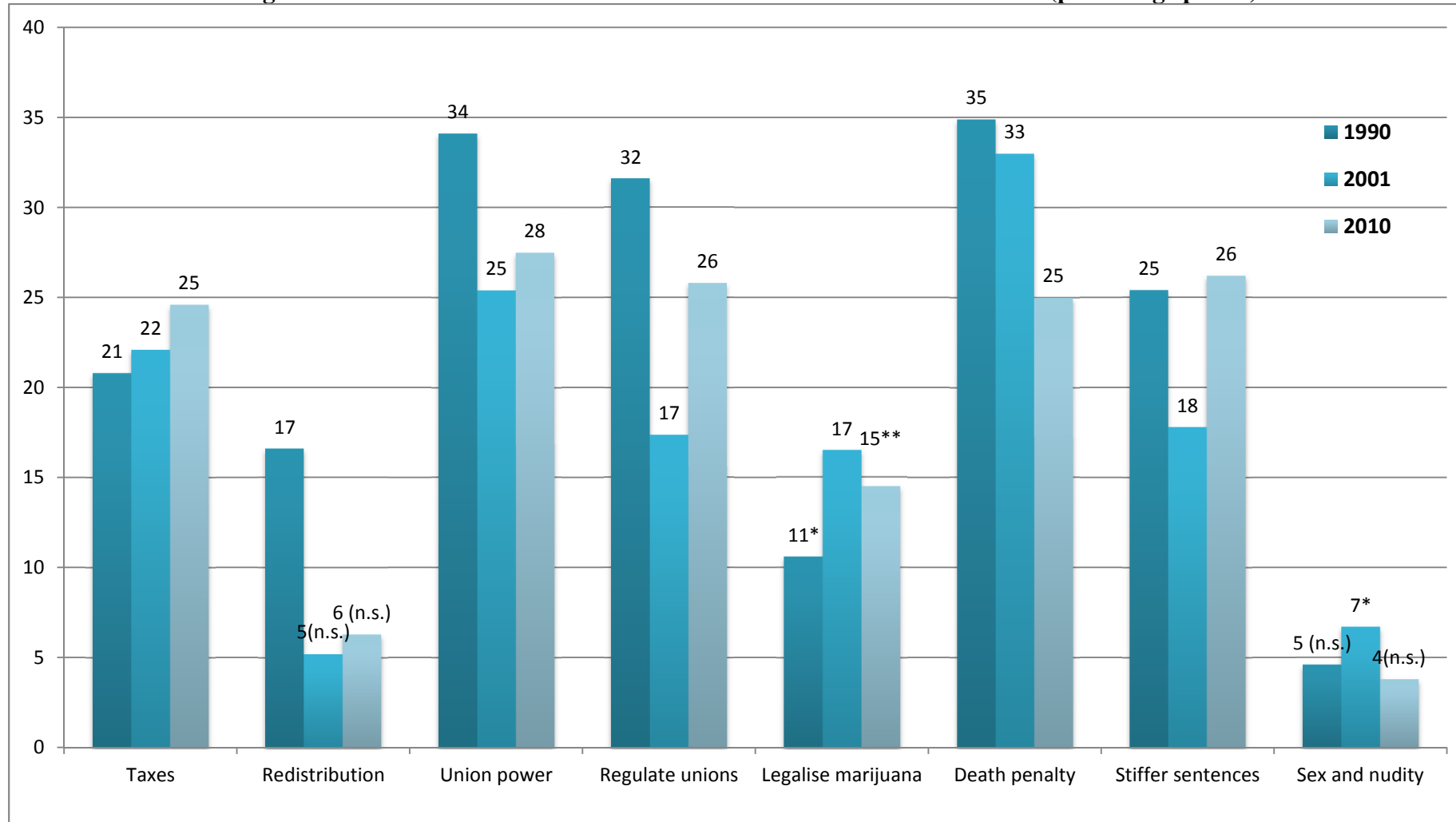
Do the two major parties exhibit the same elite-mass relationships? To answer this question, Figures 4.5 and 4.6 present the intraparty inter-coefficient distances for ALP and Coalition candidates and voters. In contrast to Figures 4.2 and 4.3, the figures in Figures 4.5 and 4.6 are comparisons of Labor candidates *versus* Labor voters, and Coalition candidates *versus* Coalition voters.³⁶ Immediately it can be seen that ALP candidates are more distant from their voters on *competition* issues. ALP candidates score 25 percentage points higher than their voters on the incentive effect of taxation ($p<.001$) and 28 and 26 percentage points higher on union power and regulating unions respectively ($p<.001$). Only the gap on redistribution does not reach statistical significance. In comparison, Coalition candidates are closer to their voters; they score 17 percentage points higher on taxation ($p<.001$), 8 percentage points lower on redistribution ($p<.01$), and 12 and 16 percentage points higher on union power and regulating unions respectively ($p<.001$).

There appear to be no clear and consistent changes over time in *competition* issues. When the *competition* issues are summed, Labor candidates are 21 percentage points more left-leaning than their voters in 2010, compared with a 14 percentage point gap for the Coalition.³⁷ However, this Labor ‘gap’ appears to have decreased between 1990 and 2010. Further, both Labor and Coalition candidates appear to be closer to their voters in 2001 than before and after. The pattern of change in the attitudinal structure will be examined in more detail in a later section.

³⁶ The table used to generate this data is available in Appendix F.

³⁷ These figures are available in Table 7.8 in Appendix F.

Figure 4.5. Inter-coefficient distances between ALP voters and candidates (percentage points).



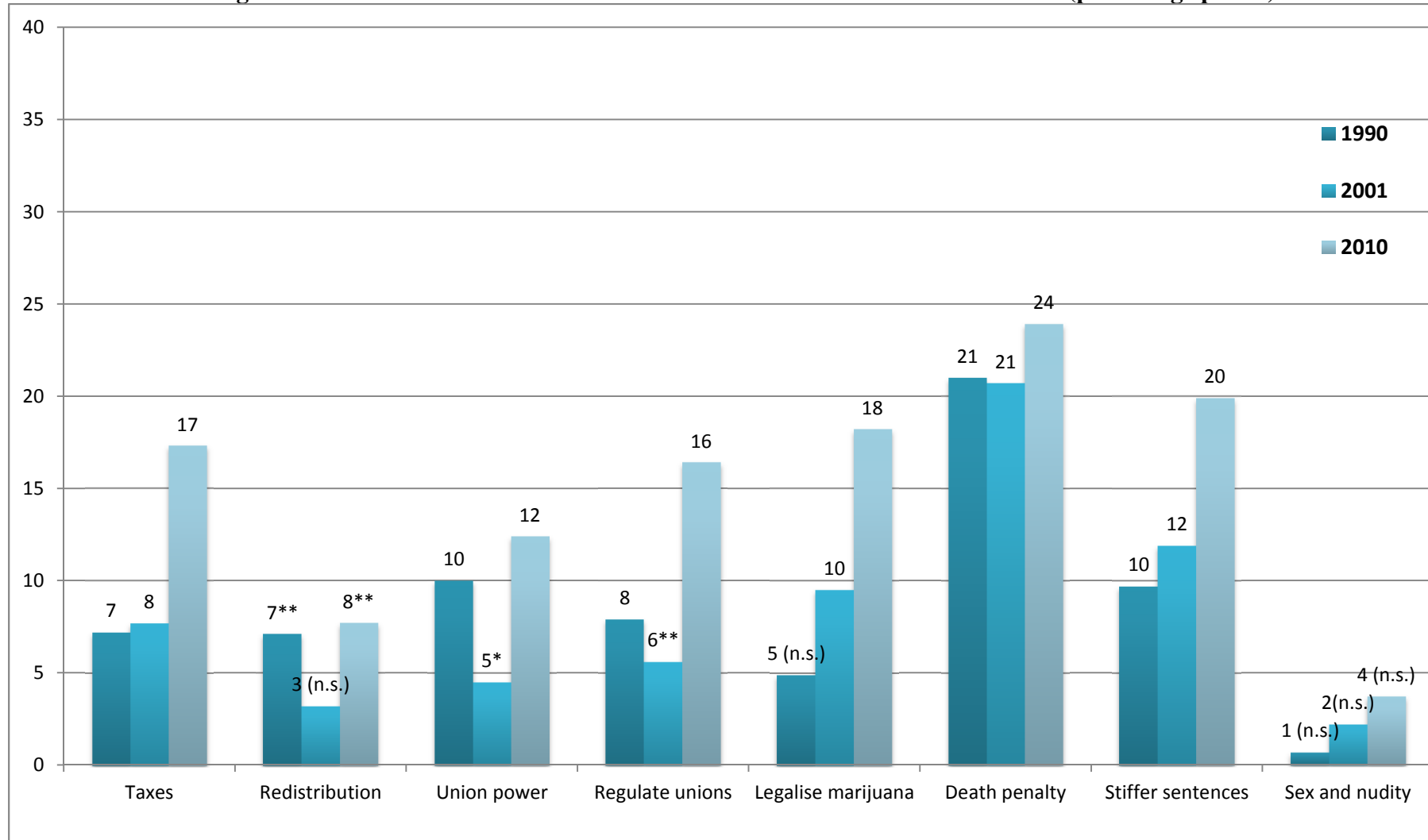
Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; (n.s.) not significant; all other figures $p < .001$.

In line with the predictions and anticipations of neo-elitists, the differences between candidates and voters on *authority* issues were generally narrower than on *competition* issues (compare Figures 4.5 and 4.6). Labor candidates in 2010 were only 15 percentage points more liberal than Labor voters on the issues of marijuana legalisation ($p < .001$), and Coalition candidates were 18 percentage points more liberal than Coalition voters ($p < .001$). The candidates were also between 20 and 26 percentage points more liberal than their respective party voters on the death penalty and on stiffer sentencing ($p < .001$). On the issue of sex and nudity in media, neither group of candidates were statistically different from their respective party voters (excepting Labor candidates in 2001). Overall, the distance between Coalition candidates and voters has increased over time. In particular, the emergence of a statistically significant difference on marijuana legalisation, and the growth of the gap on sentencing for lawbreakers, mean that Labor and Coalition candidates are roughly the same distance from their respective voters in 2010. As a whole, however, the results confirm McAllister's (1991) observation of a greater ALP attitudinal gap between candidates and voters on most issues.

In his analysis of the 1987 Australian Election Study, McAllister (1991: 255-7) found that Labor candidates were more distant from their voters on both *competition* and *authority* issues, but that this attitudinal gap had no obvious negative effect on the votes the candidate received – in contradiction with the aggregative-pluralist view. In this context, the apparent narrowing of the candidate-voter gap (and differences between the parties) in 2010 is a novel and interesting finding. This narrowing gap is also congruent with the pervasive assessment of the 2010 election campaign as lacklustre and disappointing.

Figure 4.6. Inter-coefficient distances between Coalition voters and candidates (percentage points).



Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; (n.s.) not significant; all other figures $p < .001$.

The aggregative-pluralist approach is unable to account for the fact that Labor won the 1990 election – and formed minority government with a slim two-party preferred majority in 2010 – despite being more attitudinally distant from their voters. For the aggregative-pluralist observer, the distances from voters leaves candidates and parties vulnerable to defeat. According to their model, voters should punish such distant candidates and parties by re-directing their vote to the less attitudinally distant rivals. This re-directing did not take place – which supports McAllister’s (1991: 255-7) argument about the national focus of Australian campaigns and the strong discipline of Australian political parties over their candidates. This suggests that it is not the attitudinal proximity between candidates and voters (or, more specifically, the median voter) that wins elections, but the ability of persuasive and consistent politicians – and highly visible leaders – to capture the attention and trust of voters during mass-mediated election campaigns (Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012).

For neo-elitists, these findings, and the above interpretation, look consistent with their interpretive framework. Attitudinal gaps are relatively unimportant to elites, provided they bridge these gaps by generating mass confidence, and by providing strong and disciplined leadership. The successful candidates see themselves as *leaders-trustees*, rather than *deputies* or *delegates* – and they seem successful when acting that way. Elected political elites are entrusted by voters with a broad mandate to act in what they, the elites, consider the best for their power interests, interests of their electors, their parties and the nation. Thus the attitudinal gaps may be seen as reflecting the autonomy afforded to elites, notwithstanding party discipline and constituent pressures.

4.5. Changes Over Time

As the results indicate, the attitude structures have remained relatively stable over the 20-year sampled period, though the Coalition candidates are apparently becoming more distant from their voters. However, this generally consistent pattern masks some interesting variations.

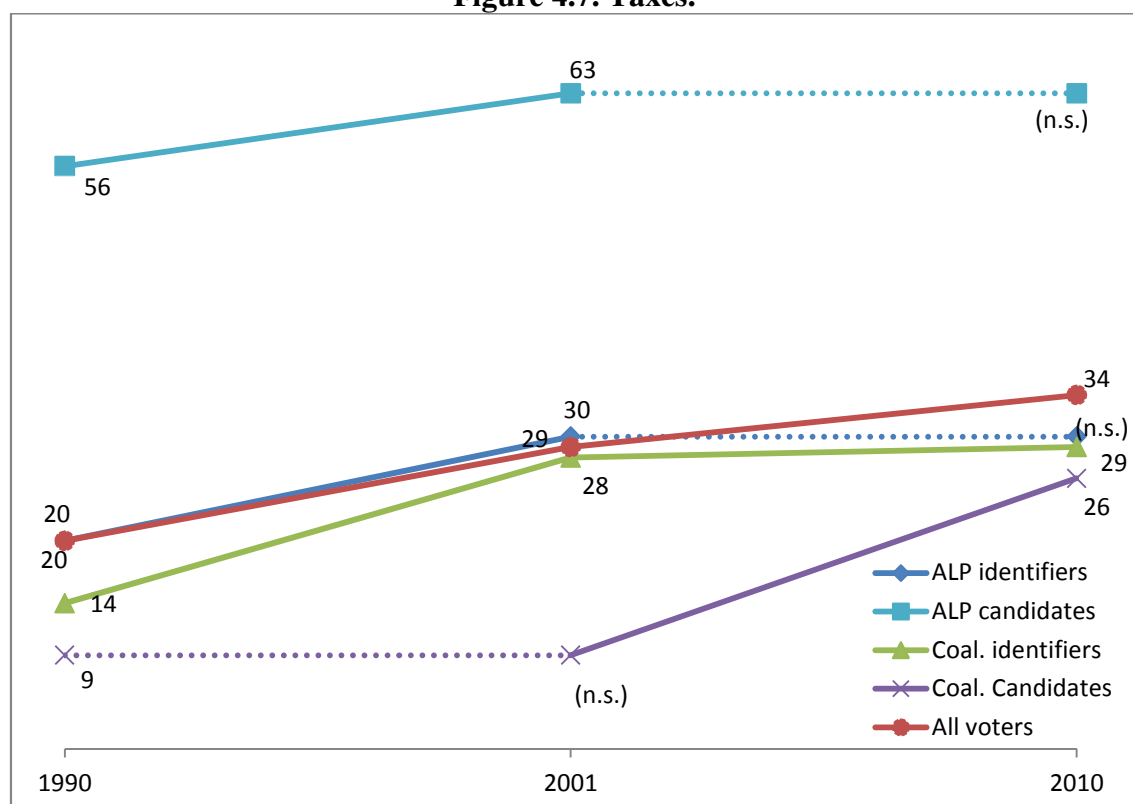
4.5.1. Competition issues

Figures 4.7 through 4.10 present the attitudinal means on *competition* issues for all groups in all sampled years. The insertion of control variables makes it difficult to add together the coefficients in the model to estimate the coefficient of a large group, as the reference

categories are not substantively meaningful. Instead, I present raw means in the figures below to give a better sense of where the various groups as a whole are positioned.

The voter figures are adjusted for age, sex and education, and the candidate figures are adjusted for age and education only.³⁸ In cases where there is no statistically significant change from the previous year, the line between figures is dotted. Note also that the figure for ‘all voters’ includes Green and other party voters, as well as non-identifiers, and as such this will not necessarily reflect the combined means of Coalition and Labor voters.

Figure 4.7. Taxes.



Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

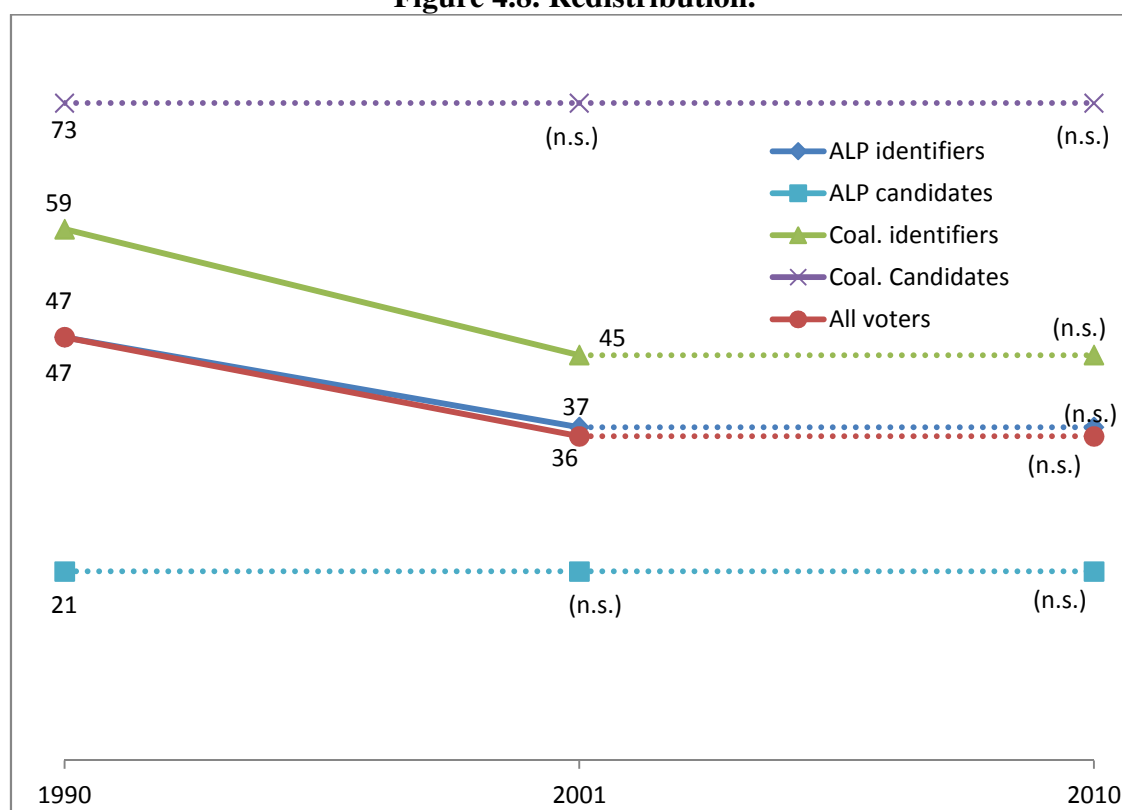
In figures 4.7-4.10, more than half of the lines between 2001 and 2010 for candidates and identifiers are dotted, indicating that most of the changes in *competition* attitudes took place between 1990 and 2001. Indeed, there have been no statistically significant changes to redistribution attitudes since 2001, and only Labor and Coalition voters have seen changes

³⁸ The sex variable is absent from the 2010 Australian Candidate Study, and is therefore excluded in any candidate regression model involving 2010.

since 1990 – Coalition voters moved 14 percentage points toward favouring redistribution ($p<.001$), and Labor voters moved nine ($p<.001$). The smaller sample size of the 2010 Australian Candidate Study was considered as a potential source of this result, but subsequent investigation revealed that it is unlikely.³⁹

There are few general trends at the level of individual questions. One exception is the trend toward disagreeing with the notion that high taxation reduces the incentive to work hard (Figure 4.7). Each group has made a statistically significant change toward disagreeing with this statement since 1990, with the most striking change being a 17 percentage points change for Coalition candidates between 1990 and 2010 ($p<.001$). A second pattern is that all groups have become marginally more favourable toward unions since 1990. All groups have moved leftward on union issues since 1990 (Figures 4.9 and 4.10), with Labor voters moving 12 percentage points between 1990 and 2001 ($p<.001$).

Figure 4.8. Redistribution.

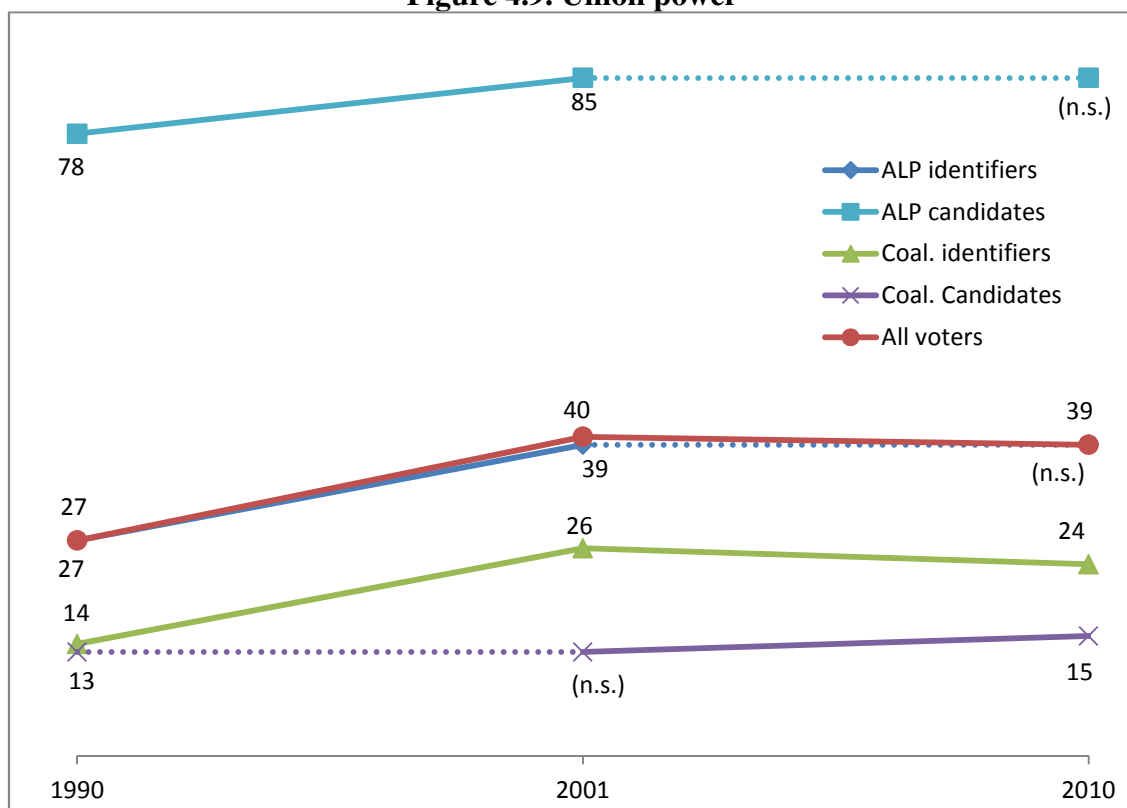


Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

³⁹ I created a weight variable to adjust for the small sample size of the 2010 ACS and ran a series of test models in the temporal analysis. While a small number of marginal results became significant (at $p<.05$) and vice versa, there were no major changes to the overall shape of the findings. As such, the weights were removed during subsequent analysis.

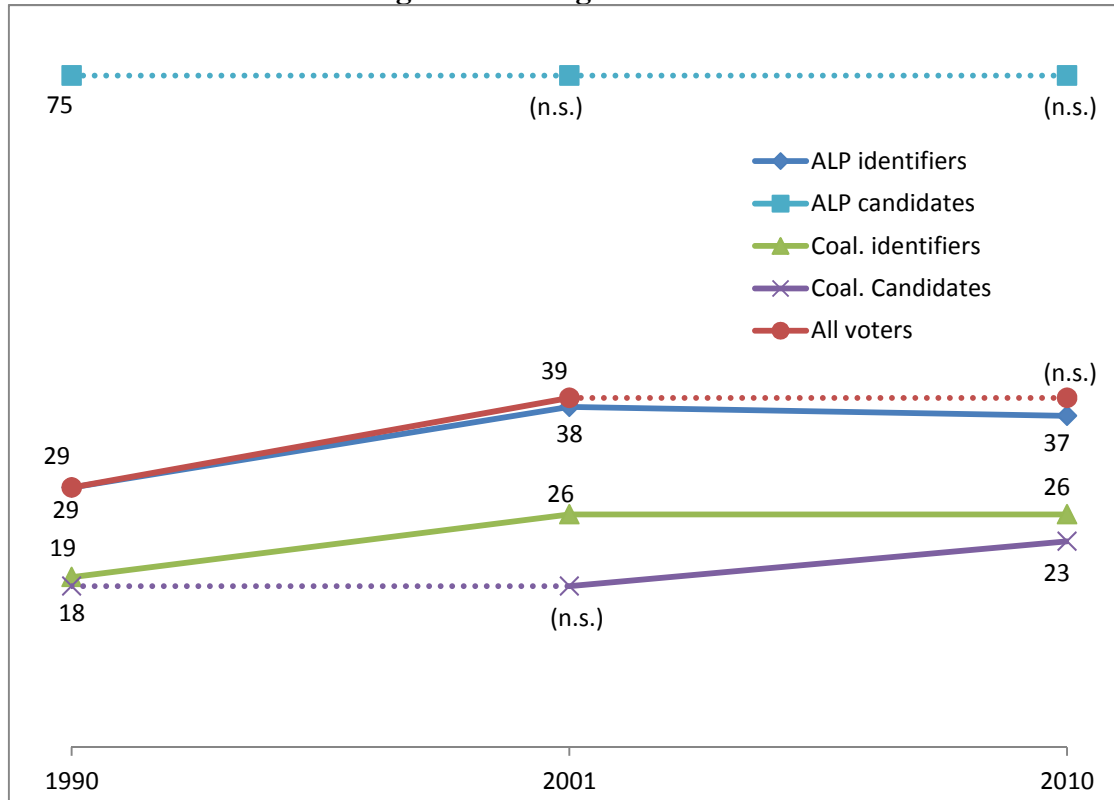
The results presented in Figures 4.7-4.10 contradict the expectations derived from the aggregative-pluralist model. In the first instance, political elites do not closely approximate the median voter on *competition* issues. Most importantly, this non-approximation accompanies political success. Despite being more distant from the mean voter position on *competition* issues in 1990 and 2010, the ALP won the 1990 election, and formed minority government in 2010. Again, this strongly suggests that elites are not penalised for ideological distance from the median voter – as suggested by neo-elitists and confirmed by the findings of McAllister's (1991) study.

Figure 4.9. Union power



Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

Figure 4.10. Regulate unions.



Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

4.5.2. Authority issues

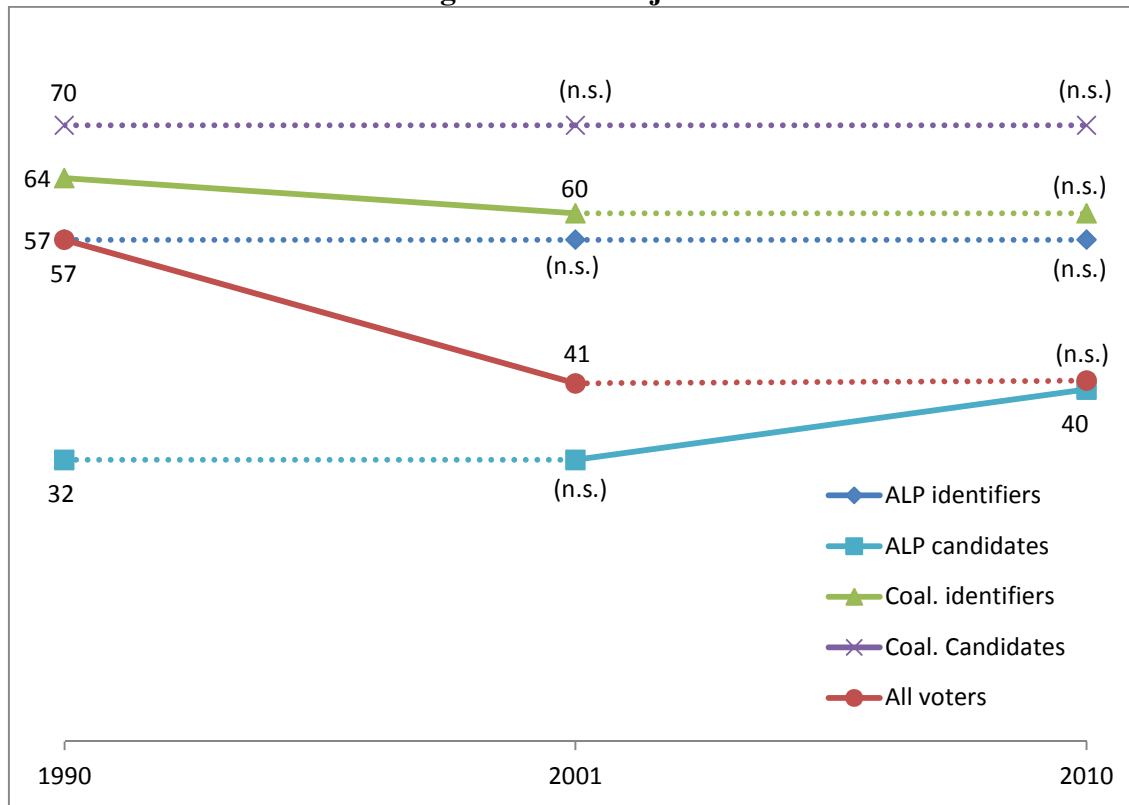
There are fewer clear patterns discerned in the results that are summarised in Figures 4.11-4.14, but there are several minor regularities worthy of note. First, voters and candidates have become more opposed to the death penalty since 1990. Coalition candidates in particular have become less favourable to its reinstatement, moving 24 percentage points since 1990 (Figure 4.12) ($p < .001$). Second, voters as a whole have become 16 percentage points more favourable toward marijuana legalisation (Figure 4.11) ($p < .001$). While there are statistically significant changes for both stiffer sentences and less sex and nudity in the media, most of them are relatively small (Figure 4.14). The largest change on these two issues was, again, among the Coalition candidates, who became 9 percentage points less favourable to stiffer sentences between 1990 and 2001 ($p < .001$).

4.5.3. Guardians of democracy?

Figures 4.11 through 4.14 also present an opportunity to test the claim, made by some neo-and demo-elitists, that elites are the key ‘guardians of democracy’ (e.g., Dye and Zeigler 1970; Pakulski and Körösiényi 2012). In an argument related to maintaining relative consensus on *authority* issues, elitists propose that political elites are more likely to be

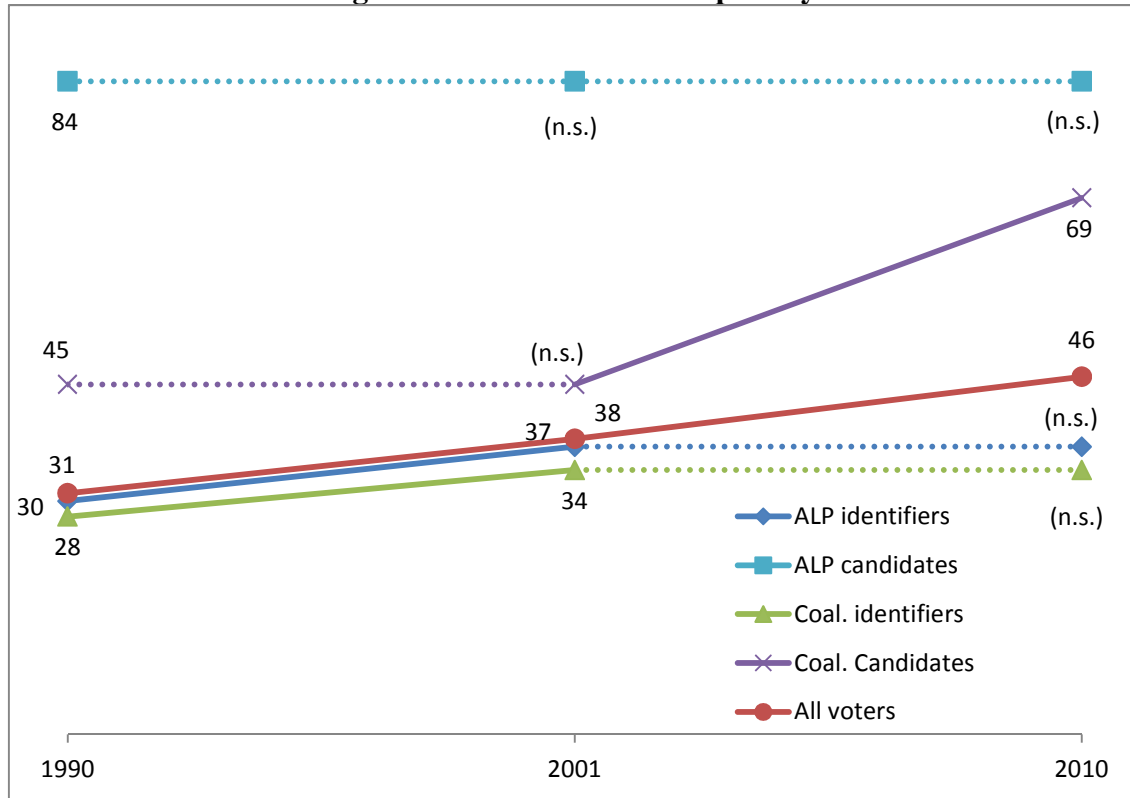
permissive and tolerant of difference, as these attitudes reflect the peaceable and non-violent approach to democratic conflict that they practice. In contrast, voters are expected to have less attachment to the democratic game and are therefore likely to have less permissive and tolerant attitudes.

Figure 4.11. Marijuana.



Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

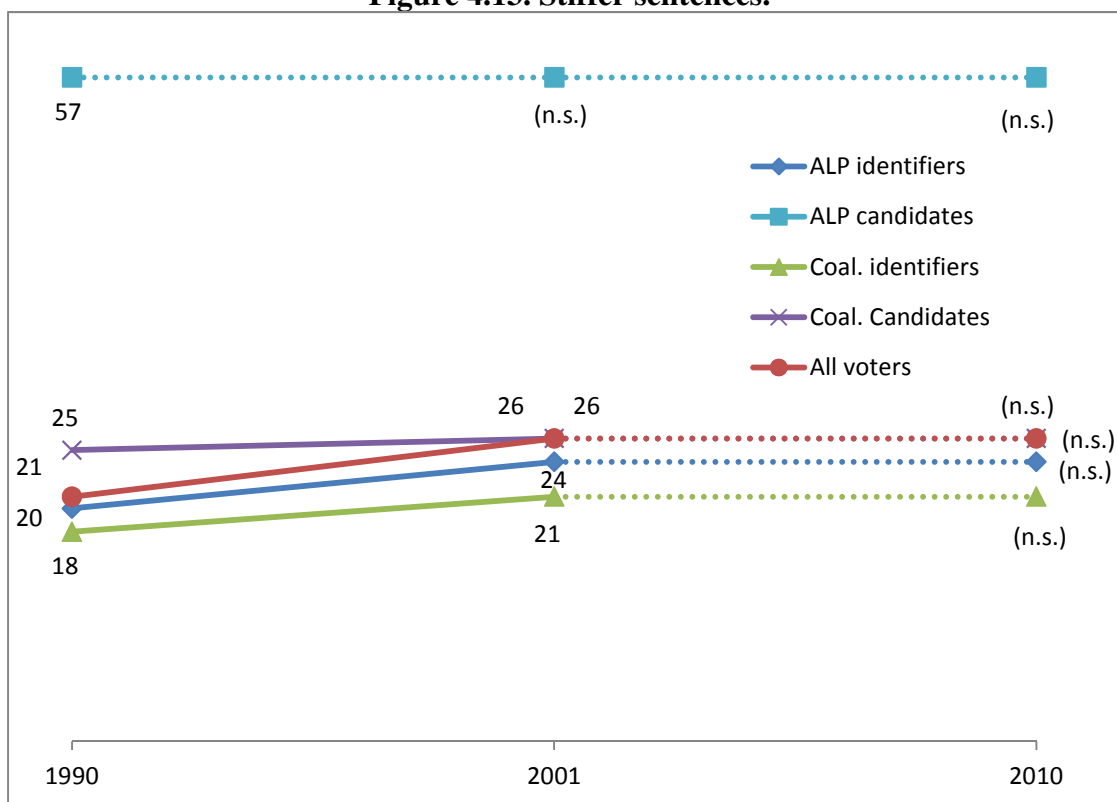
Figure 4.12. Reinstate death penalty.



Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

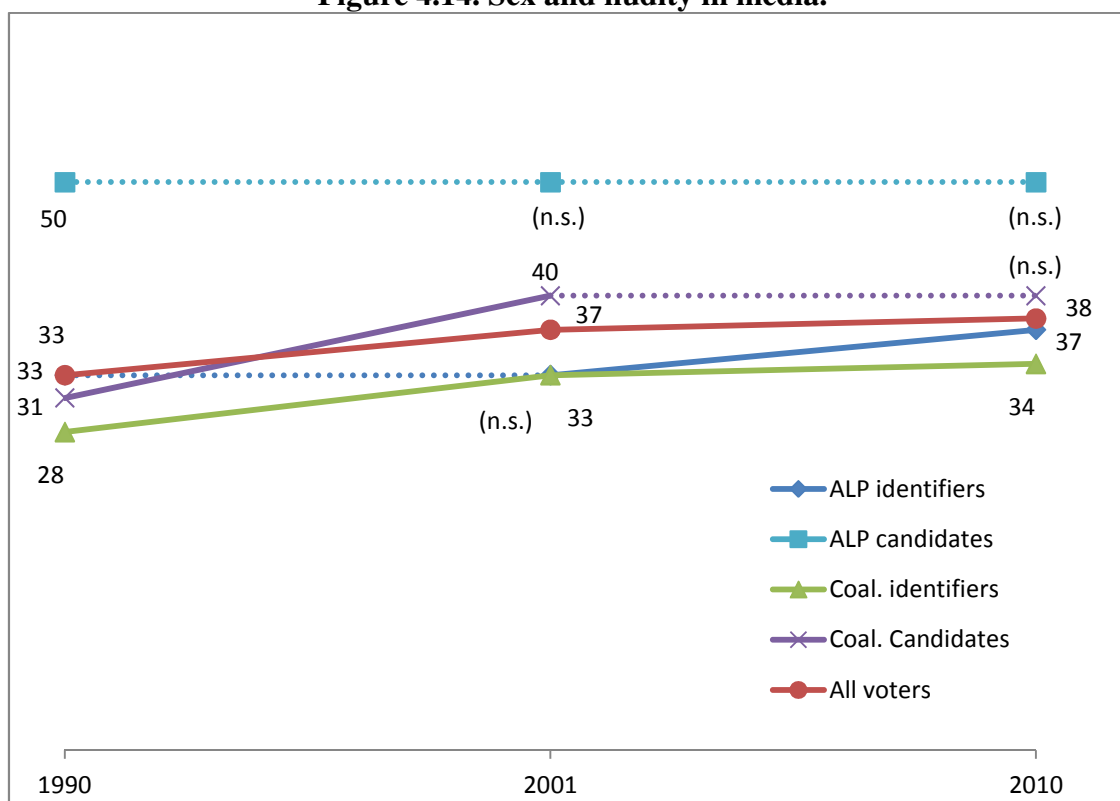
My findings offer qualified support for this argument. While candidates in general have more liberal positions than voters, the difference between voters and Coalition candidates is only large on the issue of reinstatement of the death penalty (Figure 4.12). It is also noted that Coalition candidates are more opposed to the legalisation of marijuana than their voters (Figure 4.11) but also that ALP candidates hold the most liberal and permissive views on all four *authority* issues. However, there is also some puzzling regularity. On the issue of reinstatement of the death penalty and stiffer sentencing for lawbreakers (Figures 4.12 and 4.13), this inter-party difference is large and consistent throughout the 20-year period. This is problematic for the elitist claims, because the ‘guardians of democracy’ thesis implies that the entire political elite, rather than one partisan segment, should embrace these tolerant democratic attitudes, rather than just one party.

Figure 4.13. Stiffer sentences.



Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

Figure 4.14. Sex and nudity in media.



Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011); McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2011); Bean, Gow and McAllister (2004); Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2007); McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (2007); Gow, Jones, Sim and McAllister (2004).

4.6. Elites and Masses in Australia

The results summarised above provide support for the neo-elitist model, and look inconsistent with the aggregative-pluralist model. How can one interpret these findings from the neo-elitist perspective? Candidates for Federal Parliament – both prospective and current political elites – accentuate partisan difference and disagreement mainly on *competition* political issues. These accentuated differences provide clear signals to voters about policy preferences, assisting voters' decision-making (Gilens and Murakawa 2002). They are much less divided on *authority* issues that form a common ground for effective ruling.

The results look inconsistent with an aggregative-pluralist understanding of politics and democracy in two respects. First, the positions of political elites on *competition* issues is clearly polarised, thus suggesting that a process of median voter approximation does not take place. Second, political elites downplay disagreement on *authority* issues, thus containing disagreement and conflict, even under conditions of intense partisan rivalry. While candidates sometimes disagree on *authority* issues, they do it to a much lesser extent than their stances on *competition* issues, thus maintaining a degree of consensus that is necessary for effective and democratic (that is, normatively regulated and competitive) ruling. It is the higher normative and ideological consistency of elites that teases out differences on *authority* issues. The implicitly shared norms about conflict resolution (the 'rules of the game') mean that divergent opinions are seldom polarised and divisive.

Thus the two (out of three) components of the neo-elitist understanding of elite-mass relations find strong support in my findings. First, elite de-polarisation on *authority* issues echoes Higleyan emphasis on procedural consensus underlying conflict on *competition* political issues. Second, the V shape of candidate-voter attitudes on *competition* issues confirms Putnam's (1976) observation on the elite-mass relationship, which further reinforces the notion that elite attitudes are more tightly organised by political affiliation, and that voter attitudes are relatively disorganised. The third neo-elitist claim finds only a qualified support. The notion that elites have more permissive and tolerant attitudes than voters is confirmed only by the data on ALP candidates who show substantially and consistently more tolerant and permissive attitudes than their voters – but also more tolerant than their Coalition rivals.

By contrast, the diagnosis for the aggregative-pluralist approach to democracy is poor. Neither of the expectations relating to the median voter hypothesis were supported. Elites –

whose views are structured by high education and party ideology – do not approximate the median voter position, and the party closest to the mean voter view, the Coalition, won one of the three elections held in the sampled years.⁴⁰ Further, the political attitudinal gaps between elites and voters cannot be explained by differences in educational attainment. This suggests that: (a) elite status in itself, and elite partisanship in particular, explains attitudinal variation; and (b) increasing the education of voters will not bridge the gap between elite and voter attitudes.

4.6.1. Polarisation, fragmentation, or neither?

The findings presented here depict a relatively stable configuration of elite attitudes, with a few minor changes around the edges. Conversely, some political analysts have diagnosed a process of progressive ideological-programmatic polarisation in a range of advanced democratic societies. For neo-elitists, the growing elite partisan gap in particular is symptomatic of the fragmentation of consensual unified elites in recent years (Higley and Burton 2006; Higley and Pakulski 2008). Higley and Burton (2006: 183) argue that the United States and other Western countries, including Australia, are experiencing a period in which elites become more tightly organised but also more competitive and antagonistic. Political competition for the top governmental positions sharpens, and political conflicts intensify under winner-take-all conditions. Moreover, contemporary elites are less insulated from popular pressures, due to the ubiquity of highly inquisitive mass media searching for scandal. In order to compete effectively, elites must closely monitor public opinion through polling and focus groups, and must constantly act with polling numbers in mind. This process, according to Higley and Burton, makes competitive electoral politics riskier, and it leads to adverse selection of leaders who are skilled at ruthless, high-stakes struggles. “Room for careful manoeuvres, complex compromises, and tacit quid pro quos that are essential to containing explosive issues and mollifying public discontent narrows,” Higley and Burton (2006: 196) argue. Elites attempt to re-assert authority and prestige by organising into small executive cadres and relying on charismatic leaders, thus increasing their capacity for winning votes and successfully executing their strategies.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Labor and the Coalition won 72 seats apiece in the 2010 Federal election, but Labor formed minority government with one Green and three Independent MPs.

⁴¹ George W. Bush in the United States, Tony Blair in the United Kingdom, and John Howard in Australia are forwarded as examples of ‘leonine’ elites who perform aggressive and forceful actions while disregarding conventional and implicit checks, popular discontent and internal disapproval. The Howard elite’s decision to participate in the Iraq invasion, its threats to launch pre-emptive military strikes against terrorists in Southeast

Similarly, Hetherington's (2009) review article found unanimous evidence for elite polarisation in the United States. Starting in the early 1980s, the ideological consistency of national legislators increased steadily year-on-year, a process attributed to a wide range of social-structural and institutional changes.⁴² Concomitant mass polarisation, on the other hand, is absent – the American public has remained similar in its attitudinal distribution. Hetherington instead finds considerable evidence for mass 'party sorting', where voters make better sense of clearer elite cues to sort themselves into the 'correct' party (that is, the party most closely matching their views), a process which decreased intra-party heterogeneity and increased inter-party distance (Hetherington 2009: 436).⁴³

In contrast to this picture in the United States, Adams, Green and Milazzo (2012) report that British political elites depolarised on economic and social welfare policy between 1987 and 2001. This elite depolarisation came as a result of the resignation of Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher in 1990, her succession by a series of more moderate leaders, Tony Blair's advent of 'New Labour', and the Conservative party's 1997 commitment to match Labour's public spending commitments (Adams et al. 2012: 511-2). In turn, the British public has experienced decreased partisan sorting, despite insubstantial depolarisation in terms of policy preferences. While these findings demonstrate that elite polarisation is not a secular trend in advanced democracies, they do hint at a general mechanism. Whenever political elites converge, citizens tend to converge at the level of partisan identification, despite aggregate policy preferences remaining relatively stable (Adams et al. 2012: 521).

The evidence presented in my research does not support the diagnosis of elite polarisation. The issue structure revealed in this study suggests that the consensual unity of elites has been sustained over the last 20 years. Average distances between partisan candidates on *competition* issues have remained at approximately 50 percentage points across the 20-year

Asia, its detainment of large numbers of 'boat people', and its "bare-knuckled" national campaign victories "have no clear precedent in the country's hundred years of independence" (Higley and Burton 2006: 190).

⁴² Hetherington (2009) finds evidence for increased polarisation due to: the replacement of old Congressional members with new, a redistribution of regional partisan voting patterns, economic inequality as measured by Gini, institutional reforms to enhance party leadership, and a decline in inter-party interaction, among others.

⁴³ Hetherington argues that this sorting is definitively caused by elite polarisation due to the exceptionally large correlation between the two across a 32-year period. The correlation between the mean distance between Republicans and Democrats on DW-NOMINATE scores (see Poole and Rosenthal 1984) in Congress and the mean distance between Republican and Democrat voters between 1972 and 2004 was 0.92, a figure which increases to 0.98 when confined to presidential election years (Hetherington 2009: 441).

period, and partisan voters have remained stable at around 20 percentage points. In fact, there is some evidence of extending consensus – the issue of sex and nudity in the media has all but disappeared as a source of disagreement between candidates. In the same period that Howard threatened to pre-emptively attack terrorists in Southeast Asia, sought to pass its anti-terrorism legislation (culminating in the Anti-Terrorism Act 2005), and fought ‘bare-knuckled’ election victories, my data indicate that Coalition elites in particular were equally permissive as they were in 1990, and became marginally more permissive in 2010. For this reason the intensity or dangerousness of contemporary political conflict should not be overstated.

While these results look firm and clear, it is worth cautioning against their over-interpretation, especially in assuming a close correlation between attitudes and actions. In their review of elite tolerance research, Peffley and Rorschneider (2007: 72) argue that elite researchers tend to assume that elite attitudes translate into elite behaviour. While elites are almost always found to be more tolerant in the abstract, this assumption means that little attention is paid to whether elites decide to tolerate or repress unpopular or threatening groups in the policy-making process. Peffley and Rorschneider’s (2007) findings are not wholly incompatible with elite theory, however, as they merely highlight a situation in which an axiom of classical elitism (that elites have cohesive interests and will act to defend them when threatened) comes into conflict with an axiom of democratic elitism (elites are more ‘democratic’ and tolerant than masses).

The next chapter turns attention to the important issue of voters’ views and perceptions. The results provide a useful supplement to the study of the structure of elite-mass relations.

Chapter 5 - Voters and leaders in the 2010 election campaign – analysis of political logs

In the previous chapter, I used data from the Australian Election Study and Candidate Study to establish the issue structure in elite and voter political attitudes. I charted how this issue structure changed over the last 20 years, and evaluated competing explanations of how elite and voter attitudes form and interact. In this chapter, I complement this analysis with a more interpretive study of voters' views by analysing detailed logs kept by participants during the 2010 Federal Election campaign. In particular, I examine the interaction of elites and voters in more detail by focusing on voters' perceptions of issues, leaders and parties, and on the sources of their political information. This part of the analysis is also supplemented by a systematic monitoring of the election coverage in the major Australian daily newspapers – a major source of political information for voters. The key question relates to voters' autonomy from leaders and parties: are the patterns emerging from the logs compatible with the notion of autonomous voters, as the aggregative-pluralist model suggests, or are they compatible with the neo-elitist account, which sees voters as influenced by persuasion from parties and leaders?

In answering this question, I address a series of ancillary questions about the participants. In particular, I am interested in their level of *political awareness*: how sophisticated are participants when discussing political issues, and what level of detail do they use? What are the features of this political awareness? To what extent are the concepts political awareness and autonomy related, or independent?

I am also interested in how participants understand leaders and parties. Which of these two is more important in decisions about voting? How do the participants understand the concept of leadership? Do participants consider parties and leaders dispassionately, or do they make emotional investments in them?

Any analysis of voters' perceptions would be incomplete without considering the influence of media. In particular, I will investigate which media sources participants use, and how this influences their autonomy. To what extent do the issues mentioned by voters reflect the issue

agenda presented in the daily media? If online sources are widely used, does this mean voters use ‘independent’ sources such as blogs?

Finally, I focus more directly on the autonomy of participants. A minority of my participants voted for a party different from their party identification. These represent key cases; what influenced them to vote for another party? I also briefly quantitatively analyse the extent to which the agendas of leaders and participants correspond. If participants are autonomous, their issue agendas should be independent of the agendas of leaders. On the other hand, if leaders influence and persuade voters, participant agendas should follow from them.

As described in detail in the Data and Methods chapter, I commissioned a series of ‘political logs’ from a convenience sample of 18 participants, most with higher education, and all recruited via university networks. Each participant was asked to write six weekly email logs answering four repeated questions concerning their perceptions of political candidates, issues, sources of information and general political evaluations. The logs covered the five weeks of official campaigning after the announcement of the election, and one week following the elections. The participants were offered reimbursement conditional on completing all six logs and the final debriefing interview. They were also assured of confidentiality in analysing and reporting their views. My analysis followed the Weberian interpretive strategy of positing ideal-typical constructs as yardsticks against which to measure the data, thereby shedding light on the plausibility of the contrasting accounts. I briefly recap the key research expectations of the competing models, and discuss the overall findings at the end of the chapter.

5.1. The competing models

For the purposes of this chapter, the aggregative-pluralist approach – as represented by Downs (1957), Dahl (1956, 1989) and Lipset (1981) – has the following characteristics:

- Voter-centred – voters are considered the dynamic element in this approach. Voters are the main source of change and inspiration in the political process. Elites respond to voter preferences, rather than actively ‘creating’ them;
- Voters independently identify issues and policies that are subsequently responded to by candidates;

- Voters rely on a wide range of sources (media and otherwise) and triangulate between them. These sources do not reflect their pre-existing political preferences;
- Because of the above, voters are relatively autonomous from the leaders and parties for whom they vote.

There are other implications from this approach. An aggregative-pluralist researcher may also expect voters to be highly informed about the issues that most concern them. Further, these ‘pet’ issues, and voters’ evaluations of them should be relatively stable over time. Changes in these issues and evaluations suggest reasons other than leader/party persuasion or other “campaign” variables.

The neo-elitist perspective – as represented by Field and Higley (1980) and Pakulski and Körösi (2012) – has the following features:

- Elite centred – elites are considered the dynamic element in this approach. Elites are the main source of change and inspiration in the political process;
- Parties and leaders identify and promote issues and policies that are subsequently responded to by voters;
- Voters rely on a narrow range of (mostly media) sources. These sources tend to reflect their pre-existing political preferences;
- Because of the above, voters possess a low level of autonomy from the leaders and parties for whom they vote.

5.2. The electoral campaign

Before beginning, it is important to discuss how contemporary election campaigns are understood, and some of the long-term trends impacting upon them.

Contemporary elections in advanced societies take place in a highly ‘mass-mediated’ (that is, media-saturated and media-dominated) environment. As Walter Lippmann argued in 1922, the political environment voters live in is experienced indirectly, and political communication between voters and politicians is monopolised by the mass media. This comment remains true today, but contemporary media has reached a scale and ubiquity that would have been unimaginable at the time Lippmann wrote. With the growth of electronic mass media

(especially television), electoral campaigns took on a broader, more national focus at the expense of local rallies and door-knocking. Australia is no exception, having “followed [the] worldwide trend towards ever greater technical sophistication” (McAllister 2011: 87).⁴⁴ Media play an important role in providing a rostrum for leaders and elites setting the political agenda, and the means for politicians and parties to shape public opinion.

Norris (2000) argues that the impact of the mass media makes contemporary election campaigns ‘postmodern’ in several important ways. The proliferation and fragmentation of news media outlets means that media management by parties and elites is more complex than ever. This necessitates larger and more professionalised entourage of media, advertising and strategic advisors. Whereas the ‘modern’ campaigns of the early 1960s to the late 1980s had a focus on large blocs of voters and occasional opinion polls, postmodern campaigning uses increasingly frequent polling (along with new techniques such as focus groups) and increasingly targets its messages toward small groups most likely to change their vote.⁴⁵

This postmodern campaigning takes place in the context of several other important social-political trends. Most notably, voters have undergone a process of partisan de-alignment. Across advanced industrial societies, voters are less likely to feel strongly attached to parties, less likely to sympathise with a party (that is, to have a weak leaning towards it), and more likely to declare no partisanship (Dalton 2000). In Australia the picture is similar, but the existence of compulsory voting is assumed to have maintained aggregate levels of partisanship; it is the *influence* of partisanship on voting behaviour that has declined in Australia (Marks 1993). Other traditional sources of loyalty, such as social class, have declined in their ability to predict vote choice (Nieuwbeerta and Ultee 1999). The classic distinction in Australia between Labor-voting manual workers and Liberal-National-voting non-manual workers has broken down (McAllister 2011: 152).

⁴⁴ In Australia, the 1972 federal election was the first campaign to be specifically targeted toward television. Gough Whitlam’s ‘It’s Time’ campaign focused heavily on television advertisements, and campaigns thereafter were geared toward the requirements of television (Freudenberg 2000, cited in Young 2011: 129).

⁴⁵ Norris (2000: 174) argues that the British Labour party’s 1997 election campaign exemplifies this trend: ‘For two years before polling day, a Labour task force was planned in an attempt to change the minds of 5,000 voters in each of ninety targeted marginal seats. People identified as potential Labour converts in those seats were contacted by teams of volunteers at their doorsteps, as well as by a canvassing operation run from twenty phone banks around the country...’

Politics and campaigning are also thought to have become more personalised. According to the personalisation thesis, leaders have been increasing their prominence, visibility and mass media profile vis-à-vis their parties, bureaucratic officials, and political institutions. Moreover, their exposure is increasingly ‘personal’: they are referred to by name, rather than their office/title, and the attention of the media – as well as the audiences – increasingly focuses on their personalities, rather than ideas, programs or issues of political concern (McAllister 2007). This emphasis is particularly strong during election campaigns. The focus is on leaders as individuals whose personality traits – determination, conviction, honesty, trustworthiness – either make them suitable for election or, if declared deficient, hinder their chances of winning the office. While presidential systems naturally place a much stronger emphasis on leaders and candidates, personalisation has also been diagnosed in most of the world’s parliamentary systems (McAllister 2007). Studies of the impact of leader evaluations on voting behaviour have shown modest results, but enough to decide an election result during a tight race (e.g. Bean and Mughan 1989). Despite their growing prominence in media, there is no real evidence that the impact of leaders on voting behaviour in Australia has increased (Senior and van Onselen 2008).

As a result, elections have become more *volatile* in several senses of the word: (1) parties’ share of the total vote varies more between adjacent elections; (2) voters are more likely to change their voting preferences between elections; and (3) voters increasingly make voting decisions later in the campaign (Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg 2000). These trends have led some scholars to diagnose contemporary democratic practice as leader centred (Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012). For Pakulski and Körösenyi, leaders have become more central within their parties, within the machinery of government, and especially during election campaigns. They become the key generators of electoral authorisation or mandate, understood as voters’ confidence and trust. In this context, “publicity-hungry” leaders exist in a symbiosis with “news-hungry” media, who cater to “spectacle-hungry and image-sensitive mass voters” (Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012: 55). The characteristic political process of leader democracy, therefore, is that of leaders gaining an electoral mandate through mass-mediated electoral contests.

The qualitative part of my research addresses the orientations of voters – as represented by my sample of participants – in the context of the heavily mass-mediated, personalised and leader-centred 2010 Australian federal election campaign.

5.3. The participants

Eighteen participants were selected to complete political logs based on their demographic characteristics. Two participants (both male, one aged 19 and the other 38) withdrew early in the study after failing to submit logs, leaving 16 who completed the six weeks of logs and final debriefing interview. Their age, highest level of education completed, party identification, and self-described level of political interest are presented in Table 5.1 (participants were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality).

The male withdrawals meant that the majority (81%) of the remaining participants were women, which is a source of potential bias.⁴⁶ Half the sample had completed secondary schooling or a trade qualification. This figure is a little misleading, as all those participants under age 30 who had completed secondary school were currently undertaking university degrees. The other half of the sample had a Bachelor's degree or higher, and six of these had a postgraduate degree. The high level of participant education no doubt increased their capacity for articulation, and perhaps also their level of political awareness. It is unclear whether this more educated sample means that the participants have greater political autonomy as well, as the relationship between awareness and autonomy is an important research question. Nearly half of the participants (seven of 16) identified with a major party, with four identifying with the Greens and five with no party.

⁴⁶ Gender is an important predictor of political knowledge in Australia, as women have a lower level of political knowledge than men (McAllister 1998, Tranter 2007). I anticipate that the relatively high level of education in my convenience sample will mitigate this source of bias, given that education exerts positive effects on political knowledge (Tranter 2007).

Table 5.1. Participant demographic and political information.

Participant	Sex	Age	Education	Party identification	Political Interest	Vote in House of Reps (2010)
Brian	M	22	Degree	Labor	A good deal	Labor
Cheryl	F	43	Postgraduate	Liberal	Some	Greens
Daphne	F	41	Trade	Labor	Some	Labor
Evan	M	22	Secondary	None	Some	Liberal
Gerald	M	83	Degree	Liberal	A good deal	Liberal
Ingrid	F	60	Postgraduate	Greens	A good deal	Labor
Jenny	F	65	Postgraduate	Labor	A good deal	Independent
Jessica	F	26	Secondary	Greens	Some	Greens
Jodi	F	48	Secondary	Greens	Not much	Greens
Kim	F	24	Secondary	None	Some	Independent
Lisa	F	33	Postgraduate	Greens	A good deal	Greens
Marian	F	43	Postgraduate	None	A good deal	Liberals
Megan	F	49	Secondary	None	Some	Greens
Patricia	F	59	Postgraduate	None	A good deal	Liberal
Rose	F	20	Secondary	Labor	A good deal	Labor
Tina	F	25	Secondary	Liberal	Some	Liberal

As will be clear, the sample is not statistically representative of the Australian voting population. Rather, the convenience sample aimed at selecting a wide variety of age groups, levels of education (while still maintaining a relatively high rate of literacy), political identification, and levels of political interest. It was designed to give me a sense of variation in the form and substance of political views, but not necessarily in the proportions they constitute in the wider population. Most crucially, however, I aimed to select participants articulate enough to write approximately 350 words on politics weekly for six weeks – which led me to focus my sampling on University sources (see Data and Methods chapter for details).

A few technical notes are necessary before analysis begins. First, the log questions and other instruments such as the information sheet distributed to participants and the debriefing interview schedule can be found in Appendix D. Second, the log extracts presented in this chapter have all typographical errors left in place and only have words added (such as “[Julia Gillard] is just playing games”) when it is absolutely necessary to provide context.

5.4. Political logs – voter awareness and autonomy

How knowledgeable are the participants about politics and the political process? How sophisticated are their criteria of evaluation? It became fairly clear that levels of political awareness vary widely between participants, with some of them showing a high level of interest, knowledge and sophistication, and others writing only brief and simple comments. Compare, for example, the responses of Brian and Tina:

The 'debt and deficit' fear campaign that the Coalition is running is scandalous and completely false. The country's debt only peaked at 10% of GDP, 10% while Japan it is over 100%! – and the Coalition say it is a problem? The US debt figure was \$14.078 trillion in 2009-2010. Furthermore, the budget deficit will disappear in 2012-2013 and is only \$54.4 billion in 2009-2010 (4.5% of GDP) while the US trade deficit is: \$1.171 trillion!

-Brian

[5a]

I think the liberal party might have the best solutions because historically they are better financial manager and I think Australia's purse needs filling back up from KRudds spending spree.

-Tina

[5b]

In the examples above, it is unimportant who is correct or accurate. If it were assumed that the Labor government were indeed poor financial managers, for instance, then it is easy to conclude that Brian's statement is an exercise in intellectual acrobatics and statistical misdirection to justify his allegiance to Labor. Instead, what is crucial here is that Brian used (presumably accurate) international financial information to dismiss the highly publicised Coalition claims about excessive debt incurred by Labor, and Tina relied on a vague notion of Coalition financial supremacy and an unspecified Labor 'spending spree'.

While these examples are illustrative, how is it possible to systematically assess an attribute such as political awareness? As detailed in the Data and Methods chapter, I assess the level of political awareness using the following criteria:

- Whether the participant can *identify* political issues (rather than other more superficial elements of the campaign such as personalities, styles, etc.);
- Whether the participant provides *details* when discussing issues, actions and policies (for example, the cost of the National Broadband Network, what year(s) it will be rolled out, and in what areas);
- Whether the participant provides *reasons* for liking/disliking an issue, action or policy;

- Whether the participant is able to estimate the *effect* of an issue or policy, or how policies might interact.

For example, when Jodi stated that energy prices “seem to be going out of control and will impact heavily on social and economic domains”, I have classified this as ‘low’ awareness because she did not provide any detail and did not estimate the effect of her issue in any detail. Conversely, when Brian stated that the Coalition’s climate change policy is an attempt to win Green votes “(1) because it...will actually increase our emissions by 13% as modelled by the Department of Climate Change, (2) Their leader Tony Abbott does not believe in climate change”, I have classified this as ‘high’ awareness. He provided statistical details and a personality judgement in support of his dislike of Coalition climate policies. Table 5.2 below presents participants by their 2010 vote in the House of Representatives and assessed level of political awareness.

Table 5.2. Level of political awareness by vote in House of Representatives.

		Vote in House of Representatives (2010)		
		ALP	Coalition	Greens/Independent
Awareness	High	Brian Ingrid Daphne	Gerald Marian	Cheryl Lisa Megan
	Low	Rose	Tina Patricia Evan	Jessica Jodi Kim Jenny

5.4.1. Pet issues

Remaining politically aware is difficult, even during an election campaign. It is therefore unsurprising that only half of the participants could be classified as possessing high awareness. Of the high awareness participants, half were able to maintain a high level of interest in the campaign by focusing on one or two ‘pet’ (favourite) issues for the majority of the campaign. Some participants (such as Jessica and Rose) strongly implied that they actively used their pet issues to filter campaign information. For instance, Jessica said: “This

week Julia Gillard got my attention talking about climate change.” Likewise, Rose said she “hardly take[s] notice of the policies,” instead using her evaluations of the leaders. For Brian, economic management, and especially defence of Labor’s stimulus package, occupied a large portion of his log space. Ingrid felt climate change and the removal of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) from higher education were the most important issues. Daphne concentrated on the healthcare system, but spread her attention between different aspects of it, such as mental health and women’s reproductive health. For Lisa, a Greens party member, climate change and asylum seekers were key issues, as well as other typical Greens issues such as population growth and marriage equality. These participants paid the most attention to their pet issues when they emerged in media coverage, and generally had extended and nuanced opinions on them.

The best example of a participant with high awareness across a wide range of issues was Gerald. Best described as a classic economic liberal, Gerald had detailed thoughts on economic management, parental leave, population, mental health, and a range of other issues. He also showed awareness of the leaders’ use of issues for strategic advantage. Beyond this, few participants showed political awareness across all issues that arose during the campaign.

Half of the ‘low’ awareness participants also had pet issues that they focused on. Evan and Kim were preoccupied with health – Evan to the point of excluding all other issues, while Kim mentioned environment and climate change briefly on two occasions. Jessica was mostly concerned with climate change and asylum seekers – she is similar to Lisa in that she is strongly guided by the Greens party agenda, but lacked the same level of detail in her discussion and evaluation of these issues. Finally, Patricia concentrated on economic management (intensely pressed by the Opposition critics, and highly publicised in the daily press), especially the “fiscal incompetence of the current government.”

5.4.2. Pet issues sometimes get swept away

While approximately half of participants entered the campaign period with pet issues that occupied most of their attention, they did not always remain focused on these issues for the entire campaign. One prominent example here was Ingrid. Ingrid began the campaign concerned about addressing climate change and abolishing HECS, and had “not yet” decided how she would vote in the first week of the campaign. However, in the third week of the

campaign (2-8 August), Ingrid became abruptly concerned about the possibility of Tony Abbott winning government:

I am becoming increasingly concerned that Labour could lose the election. Therefore, as of this week, preventing a Liberal government is the most important issue in the campaign! The 'slippery' analogy of Abbott from taking government by default does ring true to me...The Abbott issue will seriously affect my voting.

-Ingrid

[5c]

From this time forward, Ingrid abandoned her pet issues and focused on the leadership credentials of Abbott, as well as discussing the benefits of the National Broadband Network (NBN). Critically, the “‘slippery’” analogy she mentions comes directly from a line used frequently by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd during the week when he returned to the campaign (starting with Adams 2010).

Tina's story was similar. For the first three weeks of the campaign, Tina argued for an increase to the pension and was relatively equivocal about her party/leader preference. In the fourth week (9-15 August), however, Tina decided that economic management was the most important issue of the campaign, and that the Liberals were the superior economic managers. In her election week (16-22 August) log, Tina writes that national debt has a direct effect on her life:

Forget about kids, there [is] no way I'll even afford the petrol to drive on the rickety roads to the hospital that will leave me in the waiting room till I deliver a baby I won't be able to afford to raise.

-Tina

[5d]

These examples illustrate that, while the participants entered the campaign period with pet issues, some people could not help but get swept up in the narratives being articulated by leaders through the media. They also represent cases where pivotal vote-changing decisions were based on either 'soundbites' (Ingrid) or key messages broadcast by leaders (Tina), and reinforces the importance of these tactics in contemporary campaigning.

Even during an election campaign and despite having been selected to complete logs of their political experiences, the overall level of political awareness among participants was modest.

Combined with the use of pet issues by high awareness participants, these patterns closely fit the neo-elitist account.

5.4.3. Parties and leaders

Who are the main actors in politics: parties or leaders? When a policy is announced, a blunder is made, or responsibility is taken, who performs these acts? As a first approximation, it was helpful to count the mentions of parties versus leaders in the logs. The actor(s) that participants mention when commenting on political events indicates who they deem responsible for them. To examine this, I performed a simple keyword analysis of the logs where the mentions of parties (Labor, Liberals/Coalition, Greens) were counted against those of current and past party leaders (Julia/Gillard, Tony/Abbott, Kevin/Rudd, John/Howard, Bob/Brown)

On the whole, the participants mentioned parties twice as often as leaders. Of the 768 total mentions across the six weeks of all submitted logs, 515 (67%) were of the parties and 253 (33%) were of leaders. Mention proportions ranged from 85% parties (Marian) to 38% parties (Jodi). Importantly, there does not appear to be any association between the proportion of party/leader mentions and the participants' levels of political awareness – when participants are ranked by their leader/party ratios, high and low awareness participants are scattered throughout the list.

5.4.4. Leadership is a captured word

For several of the participants, the quality 'leadership' was captured by their partisan inclinations. Predictably, the actions of their chosen leaders are interpreted as 'leadership' or 'vision', and those of their opponents are seen as short-sighted or populist.

I believe that having a strong, principled leader who asserts authority, whilst also being amenable to listening to those with alternative viewpoints without disregarding their concerns, would reinvigorate the nation, and give the many disenchanted something to believe in...Bob Brown and the Green's are way ahead of the two old parties. They have policies for things, and are not afraid of proposing ideas that may be risky, but which will ultimately enable Australia to move ahead to a brighter future.

-Lisa [emphasis in original]

[5e]

[Julia Gillard's] policies are a little reactionary for me, rather than visionary, but in the past she has shown in education that she has the potential to present new and effective ideas for the future...Tony Abbott has shown strong leadership skills, but no vision whatsoever, unless it is a vision of the past.

-Lisa

[5f]

Immigration hysteria seemed to be strategically triggered by Gillard to win back voters alienated by Left-wing-seeming Rudd.

-Jessica [5g]

...it is great to see Julia Gillard the first woman in the office of prime minister and from listening to her speak she is a very considered person and makes a good leader.

-Brian [5h]

With the exception of Lisa, it was difficult for participants to consider leadership dispassionately as a quality that can be held by those with whom you disagree. In this sense, 'leadership' has been captured by partisans and used as a fairly routine descriptor when recounting political events and justifying choices.

5.4.5. People vote for parties, but trust (and hate) leaders

When describing who they thought was best, or who they intended to vote for, participants routinely designated parties and local candidates as the more appropriate entities.

The Labor Party is the group that has tackled, and needs to tackle these issues more effectively, especially with education, housing and employment.

-Rose [5i]

I intend to Vote for the Liberal candidates in both the House of Reps and the Senate.

-Gerald [5j]

Parties are part of the official machinery of government, the official competitors in the election campaigns, and it is parties to which the participants sent their votes. Beyond the simple act of voting, however, leaders appear to have a role in engendering more visceral and emotional reactions in politics, a finding congruent with the personalisation of politics theory, as well as the claims of advocates of 'leader democracy'.

I am going to vote for Labor mostly as I like Julia Gillard, even though I still have a bit of grudge about the Rudd situation.

-Rose [5k]

I guess I might vote for her [Gillard] because she's a woman and she seems to be tough...I trust her because she's a woman and instinctively, women are more caring, and Must care about the environment in which their children live.

-Jodi [5l]

In Rose's conception, the party receives the vote, but the decision is based on her personal evaluation of Julia Gillard. While several participants were displeased by the sudden

replacement of Kevin Rudd by Julia Gillard as Prime Minister,⁴⁷ none of the participants suggested that this would affect their voting decision. Instead, like Rose, many made a favourable evaluation of Gillard.

Jodi's comments represent an extreme example of personal trust or confidence invested in a leader. The basis of her trust is idiosyncratic but still conforms to expectations about trust in democratic leaders. While there is an extensive psychological literature on trust in leaders generally (see Dirks and Ferrin 2002), the link between democratic leadership and trust/confidence has been less thoroughly explored. Kane and Patapan (2012: 82-5) briefly discuss trust, writing that democratic leaders attempt to reinforce trust by appealing to the three contradictory forms of democratic representation: *identity*, *servantship* and *trusteeship*.⁴⁸ Voters (as a group) are likely to demand that leaders conform to all three of these democratic forms simultaneously, and as such, trust in leaders is always incomplete. Gillard's status as a woman gives her important personal qualities in Jodi's eyes, leading to legitimate identity representation.

5.4.6. *Political performance as fulfilment of promises*

Parties and leaders compete for Federal power using rhetoric. But how can voters be sure they will follow through? The performances of leaders in the media were also used as a measure of the sincerity of a party's policy intentions.

I liked Abbott's idea to bring the economy back into a surplus but then he seems to be making a lot of promises that I'm not sure he can keep. Gillard's solutions seems to be more realistic so far than Abbott's and more in tune with the common people.

-Cheryl

[5m]

As Kane and Patapan (2012) argue, the fact of leadership sits in irrevocable tension with the democratic notion of popular sovereignty. Because electoral victory and continued confidence rest upon consent gained from discussion and debate, rhetoric is the primary tool of the democratic leader. Democratic citizens, however, "tend to be deeply suspicious of political rhetoric, regarding it as either the empty words of deceitful politicians or powerful

⁴⁷ Around 74 per cent of respondents to the 2010 Australian Election Study disapproved of the way Gillard replaced Rudd as leader (McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch 2010).

⁴⁸ *Identity* refers to legitimate representation on the basis that the elector and the elected resemble one another, or share an identity. *Servantship* refers to representation wherein the elected acts as a servant under permanent instruction. *Trusteeship* refers to representation where the elected exercises his or her independent judgement in the best interests of the elector (Kane and Patapan 2012: 42-4). See also Pitkin (1967).

language that may be used to subvert legitimate democratic institutions and processes” (Kane and Patapan 2012: 71). Because of the centrality of the notion of popular sovereignty to democratic culture, leaders displaying pretensions toward superior knowledge or talents are often thought to be arrogant or ‘elitist’. Successful democratic rhetoric, therefore, is “an art of artless persuasion that necessarily presents itself as unrhetorical, marking a concession to the authority of the sovereign people” (Kane and Patapan 2012: 72). In Cheryl’s case (excerpt 5.13), Gillard convincingly presented herself as ‘ordinary’ to Cheryl, which sheds a favourable light on Gillard’s character and policy promises.

Participants thus understood leaders as actors who make and break promises, who engender respect and disgust and who forge and maintain an emotional link with the voting public. An exception here was Patricia, whose dissatisfaction with Labor leads her to distrust the entire party:

I have come to the conclusion that Labor does not tell the truth to the Australian people (broadband, financial downturn, their longterm intentions regarding social changes etc etc). Therefore they cannot be trusted, so they do not deserve my vote.

-Patricia

[5n]

5.4.7. ‘The people’ and populism

A corollary of this use of leaders as an emotional link is the rhetorical use of ‘the people’. As extracts 5m and 5n both illustrate, lying, truth-telling, broken promises and so forth happen mainly in the competitive-electoral dialogue between leaders and voters. Being truthful (and therefore trustworthy) and telling the truth to the Australian people is a crucial element of political appeal. It is central for creating an emotional link between leaders and voters.

Brian also illustrates this point:

Tony Abbott is a pure coward – first he outright rejected a debate and constantly refused to a debate, then had the nerve to demand that Julia attend a public forum but no debate. Then he offered an inadequate 30 minute time slot for the debate which clashed with Julia Gillard’s timetable – which he knew about then lied to the Australian people by claiming that Julia was running scared – that is pure spin plain and simple.

-Brian

[5o]

This orientation is hard to square with Canovan’s (2005) notions of *new populism* or *politicians’ populism*. New populism denotes a confrontational style where politicians “claim

to represent the rightful source of legitimate power – the people, whose interests and wishes have been ignored by self-interested politicians and politically correct intellectuals” (2005: 74). Politicians’ populism, by contrast, is “a kind of ‘catch-all’ politics that sets out to appeal to the people as a whole...A professional politician...sets out to appeal across old demarcations, playing down divisions along the lines of party, class or ideology and stressing the unity of the whole people” (2005: 77). The main reason for this difficulty in interpretation is that the source of the populism here is not politicians but voters themselves. The participants do not sound ideological, and they do not expect political leaders to follow the voters’ preferences. Instead, they want leaders to ‘tell the truth’ in the sense of clearly declaring their political intentions, maintaining consistency throughout the campaign, and keeping their promises during the subsequent rule. I emphasise the importance of this stress on, and expectation of, leaders’ sincerity, consistency and truth-telling in the leader-voter dialogue – as seen from the voters’ perspective.

5.4.8. Disillusionment with the mass-mediated leadership contest

Several participants expressed disappointment and cynicism toward the mediated leadership competition they witnessed during the 2010 campaign. This was echoed by a number of political journalists and commentators, remarking on the trivial and boring nature of the campaign, with a superficial focus on appearance and presentation to the detriment of hard-headed policy (e.g. Megalogenis 2010; MacCallum 2010; *Sydney Morning Herald* 2010). Megalogenis writes:

The 2010 campaign was the sound of a nation needlessly fracturing. Each side of politics clung like a barnacle to its version of reality. It is rare for the main parties to talk themselves into opposite corners of a room. One or the other has usually had a strong enough sense of where the majority sits to lay claim to it. But Gillard and Abbott, and behind them their poll-obsessed teams, were so terrified of offending the disengaged that they forgot to inspire the voters who were paying attention (Megalogenis 2010: 2-3).

These themes are common in critiques of the media-centric political campaigns of the contemporary era. In her study of Australian election reporting in the 2000s, Sally Young writes that the two most common academic criticisms of contemporary political journalism are ‘horse-race’ reporting and the ‘dumbing down’ of political debates. Horse-race reporting refers to a pervasive framing of the election as a competition or sport, with continual reference to who’s winning and losing (especially using opinion poll data), what tactics the competitors are using, and reporting the election using sport or war metaphors (Young 2011:

8). Similarly, the dumbing down critique of contemporary political campaign coverage decries the focus on entertainment and ‘human interest’ frames rather than carefully researched journalism on serious topics. This is accompanied by a rise of commentary and interpretive pieces and a decrease in straight, factual reporting (Young 2011: 9-10).

While there are no comments that can be straightforwardly interpreted as a ‘dumbing down’ critique, several participants did berate the trivial nature of the political campaign:

[What do you consider the most important issues in the current campaign?] Empty promises, work choices and unrealistic pots of money, and being ‘real’. The main two parties don’t seem to be addressing any specific issues, just saying what the opposition hasn’t done or did badly in previous year and spending time shaking hands, kissing babies and visiting marginal seats.
-Megan [5p]

This week, even more than previous weeks, management of the election campaigns seems to [be] the [dominant] election issue if the daily media is to be believed!
-Ingrid [5q]

Further, other participants – Gerald, Marian, Kim, Jessica, and Jenny – mentioned the ‘boring’, ‘poor’ and ‘lame’ nature of the campaign in their debriefing interviews. Dissatisfaction of this sort is not new, and is tied to a widespread democratic malaise affecting citizens in advanced democracies (Dalton 2004; Norris 1999, 2011). However, the particularly poll-driven nature is uniquely Australian (Brent 2007: 131) and emerged most strongly only since the 2007 election (Young 2010: 186; Megalogenis 2010: 29). It was a tendency that was clearly registered by the participants. While the participants generally directed their anger at leaders, I speculate that, if prompted, they would be equally critical of media as well. The mediated leadership contest appears to voters as one entity, and it becomes difficult to disentangle exactly who is to blame for the unsatisfactory performance.

This theme of contest disillusionment sits in tension with the focus on sincerity of leaders. On the one hand, voters seem to require some kind of emotional link with leaders – be it trust/distrust, warmth/dislike/disgust, or any other idiosyncratic connection. On the other hand, they decry the process by which leaders attempt to establish this emotional connection. Combined with its competitive and strategic aspect, the process of leader-voter dialogue becomes difficult and messy. This is well illustrated by the difficulty Julia Gillard had in reasserting that voters were seeing the ‘real Julia’ on the campaign trail. During the third

week of the campaign, Gillard admitted that the well-groomed and tightly controlled image she had been transmitting was not the “real Julia”, and subsequently promised to “be herself” and take risks (*The Age* 2010b: 6). This, of course, omits the fact that Gillard’s entire campaign performance after this point was expected to be immaculately stage-managed. It does however highlight the importance of appearing sincere and authentic. The necessity for elite manoeuvre in the context of strategic competition for votes places leaders under great strain in the search for sincerity and trust. These characteristics are difficult to maintain when leaders must adjust policies and rhetorical modes during elections to maximise their votes.

5.4.9. Media use – the digital revolution?

Participant access to the Federal Election campaign was highly mediated.⁴⁹ They made intense use of multiple media sources, noting an average of 15 media use-mentions across the six weeks, an average of 2.5 sources per week. Newspapers and television news constituted approximately 60 per cent of all media sources.

Notably, a minority made extensive use of online media, constituting 22 per cent of all media sources declared by participants. Brian, the most ‘online’ participant, made 20 use-mentions of online sources, including online newspapers, live streaming of Parliamentary Question Time, and the Parliamentary Hansard. Similarly, Cheryl and Lisa made extensive use of online sources – Cheryl mainly used party websites and major newspaper websites; Lisa used a more diverse range of sources, including a variety of Twitter feeds, online news and streaming television. Between them, these three participants account for almost three quarters of all online media use-mentions.

These examples caution against uncritically embracing the ‘e-democracy’ thesis. Early proponents such as Grossman (1996) argued that the internet could return contemporary democracy to its classical Greek roots by increasing citizen information, participation and deliberation. The increased speed of modern communications technologies would allow citizens to more easily check on the activities of politicians, increasing accountability. I observed some activity that could meet this high standard: Brian, in particular, accessed ‘high quality’ Parliamentary sources. However, the other 15 participants also had these high quality

⁴⁹ As part of the second regular question, participants were asked: “What was/were the main source(s) of your information on this issue (e.g. Internet news/blogs, The Australian, The Mercury, Win News, conversation with friends)?” An answer such as “The Australian” or “ABC News online” constitutes one use-mention.

sources at their disposal but chose not to access them. This echoes Levine's (2002) critique of the e-democracy thesis, where he argues that the convenience provided by online information will not increase participation in the political system (Levine is writing about the United States, where voting is voluntary). The availability of information online does not in itself improve political competence and participation for two main reasons: online sources vary in their quality, and on line communication does not give citizens a group identity – it is incapable of moving them from individualised rational abstention to a group identity with interests and ideals at stake (Levine 2002: 125). Further, as Levine (2002) notes, the potential for the internet to act like a deliberative 'town hall meeting' is rarely met. Instead, internet users can easily select information sources that do not expose them to diverse views. The three internet-savvy participants, for instance, did not mention any sources that approximate a deliberative forum. Indeed, a large proportion of their sources were online versions of newspapers and television channels. For most participants internet use was therefore only a convenient substitute for standard mass media.

5.4.10. Who speaks: media or leaders?

With few exceptions, participants noted the media references to parties and leaders as the source of the issues that they were most concerned about in any given week. When prompted to answer who raised these issues, participants almost always referred to parties and leaders:

I first heard about Gillard's policy with the cadetship and thought that sounded really good. I next heard about Abbott's education tax refund but it seemed like a quick scheme to gain support rather than an actual plan to do 'something' for our young ones.

-Cheryl

[5r]

Julia Gillard from the Labor party presented the environmental/car initiative.

-Daphne

[5s]

The strongest exception to this general trend was Cheryl. Cheryl raised the issues of health reform and drug policy in the final campaign week and the week after the election, following personal experiences that prompted her to think about these issues. She subsequently researched the parties' policies on their websites:

Having been back to the doctors a few times and in hospital arranging for surgery my focus has turned back to the health system...The websites for both parties contain the information and that's where I sourced my information.

-Cheryl

[5t]

I was focused on drug issues due to wanting to volunteer with Red Cross and help with the Save-A-Mate program so my attention went to this area. So, I looked more closely at policies that looked at this issue which I feel is one that simmers beneath the surface of society.

-Cheryl

[5u]

Patricia represents another exception. She did not attribute her concern for economic management to parties/leaders but predominantly and directly to *The Australian*. Daphne, by contrast, attributed her focus on mental health to an independent expert. While it is important to note that the question prompts the respondents for a “political figure or group” that raised the issue,⁵⁰ the exceptions listed here illustrate that participants were often able to identify when parties/leaders were not the source of their focus on a particular issue.

Overall, this pattern matches the classical elitist account of voters’ indirect access to politics. In his account of public opinion, Walter Lippmann (1922) argues that the political environment in which voters live must be experienced indirectly, as they are geographically and socially removed from it; the political world must instead be “explored, reported, and imagined” (Lippmann 1922: 18) through mass media. Lippmann was critical of ‘classical’ democratic theory for failing to analyse this additional mediating institution. Media’s value lay in providing an additional layer of expertise in the form of journalists and commentators dedicated to representing these unseen facts, allowing us to “escape from the intolerable and unworkable fiction that each of us must [independently] acquire a competent opinion about all public affairs” (Lippmann 1922: 19). It is clear that the participants’ access to the political system, and their process of deciding how to vote, was heavily mediated through such experts.

While mediated access to politics is an unavoidable reality, the ubiquity of parties and leaders as declared sources of information is indicative of the low *political autonomy* of participants. By using parties and leaders as sources when deciding their most important issues, participants were accepting both the issue agenda and the preferred interpretation (‘frame’) provided by the key political actors. In this sense, participants mirrored the frames used in electoral competition. It is this notion of political autonomy that I will now explore more thoroughly.

⁵⁰ The question reads: ‘Who – that is, which political figure or group – signalled these issues?’ Please refer to Appendix D for the full list of questions.

5.5. Examining political autonomy

There are three cases where participants who identified initially with one party, ultimately voted for another party or independent candidate. Cheryl is a Liberal identifier who voted for the Greens in 2010. In the first week of the election campaign, she was undecided but leaning towards supporting Julia Gillard, apparently due to a personal dislike of Tony Abbott. Further into the campaign, she began independently researching Greens policy (especially through their website). Her ultimate voting decision was based on this policy research and acquaintance with Greens candidates:

Despite the fact I didn't hear much about the Greens online or via my usual sources I decided after I'd searched through their site and looked over their policies that they seemed as reasonable as Labor or Liberal. The main driver however was that my husband had met Christine Milne and was familiar with her work ethics and to be completely honest that knowledge directed me to make my vote.

-Cheryl

[5v]

Ingrid is a Greens identifier who ended up voting for Labor. As mentioned earlier, Ingrid's pet issues were swept away after she became concerned at the prospect of Abbott "sliding into office by default" (Adams 2010). Her final vote was decided on strategic grounds based on this fact:

I voted Labour for the Lower House and the Greens for the Upper House. The vote for Labour was driven by the need to prevent a Liberal government. If Labour has a strong lead in the polls, I would have voted Green in the Lower House. I was very secure in voting for the Greens in the Upper House because I feel that, in holding the balance of power, they will negotiate for positive change.

-Ingrid

[5w]

Jenny was a highly idiosyncratic participant. While she does not explain why she did not vote for Labor in the House of Representatives (as her party identification would suggest), she makes clear the importance of the qualities of local candidates to her:

I voted for Independent Andrew Wilkie for House of Reps. I have been impressed with him from when he "leaked information re Iraq in Howards time"[.] His policies were clear, his vehicle with the amount of monies "wasted" on pokies right up front and very effective. I found independent Senator Harradine represented Tasmania well and secured valuable assistance for his state. Andrew Wilkie seems to be of a similar character...I voted for Lisa Singh in the

Senate – I have experienced her assistance personally and was disappointed when she lost her seat at the state elections.

-Jenny

[5x]

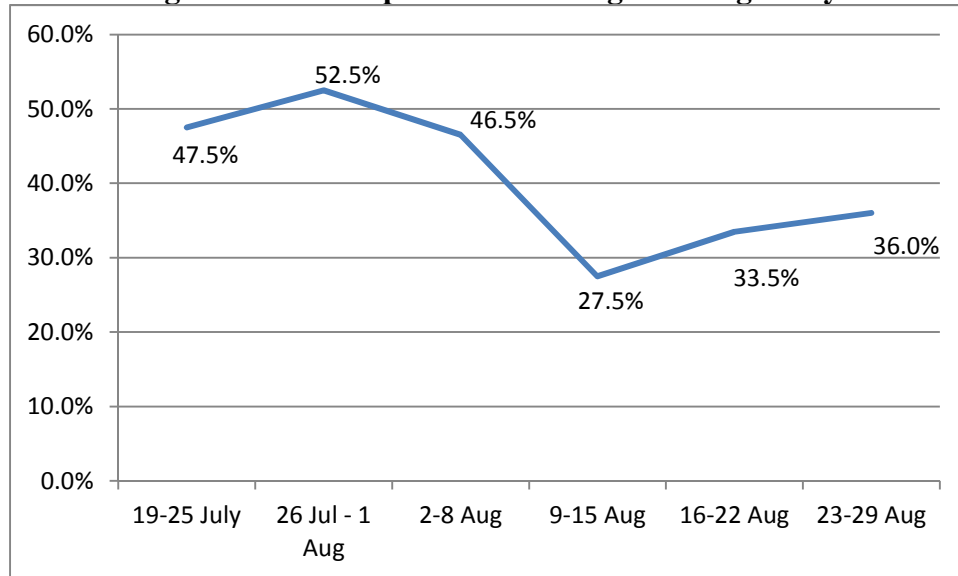
Cheryl's decision to vote Green involved a high level of autonomy as she independently researched policy and gives few hints of being persuaded by leader rhetoric. Ingrid's decision, on the other hand, was almost self-consciously based on the fear of Tony Abbott winning the Prime Ministership, as mentioned frequently by Kevin Rudd in the third week of the campaign. Jenny and Cheryl's decisions share an important similarity in their emphasis on personal meetings and emotional connections with local candidates.

5.5.1. Agenda originality

If participants as a group are autonomous, their choice of most important issues should be different from, and relatively independent of, media coverage of leader statements. As mentioned earlier, the issue agendas and interpretive frames of the participants and the mainstream media have overlapped closely. To test the question of autonomy further, I more carefully analysed leaders' and participants' agendas. To briefly re-cap, leader agendas were ascertained by sampling their quotes and paraphrases from three daily newspapers across the six weeks of the campaign, which were then categorised by topic. The leaders' agenda for each week was determined by calculating the proportion of quotes and paraphrases in each topic area. The participant (voters') agenda was determined by collating each participants' most important issues for the week (maximum of two). The resulting *agenda originality* was calculated by subtracting the proportion of each agenda item of participants from the leaders' agenda, summed and halved to make a percentage.

Figure 5.3 presents the *originality* of the leader and participant agendas for the six weeks of the campaign. This figure represents the extent to which the two agendas are separate from each other – 0% means the agendas are identical, and 100% meaning they are completely different. During the first three weeks of the campaign, the leader and participant agendas were about 50% different, but demonstrated sudden convergence to around 30% difference for the final two weeks and the first week after the election (the election was held on Saturday 21 August).

Figure 5.3. Participant vs. leader agenda originality.



This suggests that as the election loomed closer, participants began to adopt the leaders' agenda as they came to make a final voting decision. However, this agenda convergence does not, by itself, make the elitist account more plausible than the aggregative-pluralist account. Under both approaches, the gap between participants and leaders should be closed as the election looms, and the importance of maintaining matching agendas becomes critical. For aggregative-pluralists, this gap should be closed by leaders in the process of competing for the votes of citizens with relatively fixed preferences. For elitists, the gap should be closed by participants whose views are influenced by the persuasive calls of leaders. Therefore the data on originality alone does not indicate which scenario is more plausible than the other.

If agenda convergence is viewed dynamically, however, it can grant greater insight. To further investigate this problem, I examined whether the agenda convergence comes more from participants or leaders during the two final weeks of the campaign. If the aggregative-pluralist account is more plausible, the leader agendas of weeks 4 and 5 should be more similar to the participant agendas of weeks 3 and 4 than *vice versa*. This would mean that the agendas of both groups had converged because leaders had adopted part of the participants' agendas. The elitist approach predicts the opposite: the participant agendas of weeks 4 and 5 should be more similar to the leader agendas of weeks 3 and 4 than *vice versa*.

Table 5.4 presents agenda originality scores where participants and leaders are compared with their opposite number one week earlier.

Table 5.4. Delayed participant vs. leader agenda originality.

	Leaders Week 3	Leaders Week 4	Leaders Week 5
Participants Week 3	-	46.0%	-
Participants Week 4	48.5%	-	45.0%
Participants Week 5	-	33.0%	-

When leader agendas are compared with those of participants one week earlier, I find originality scores of approximately 45%, suggesting relatively little convergence. The participant agenda of week 4 *versus* leader agenda of week 3 is similar. However, the final figure, participants week 5 *versus* leaders week 4 is substantially lower at 33%. This means that during the critical pre-election week, the participant agenda became more similar to the leader agenda of the previous week. This in turn suggests that the pre-election agenda convergence largely resulted from participants adopting the agenda of leaders in the preceding week.

5.6. Conclusions

On balance, the results discussed in this chapter point toward participants possessing low political autonomy. The main reasons for this conclusion can be summarised in four points:

1. Participant information about the election was generally sourced from leaders and parties themselves via the media;
2. Some participants had their pet issues swept away by the narratives of leaders;
3. ‘Leadership’ means actions and policies that align with the participants pre-existing partisan inclinations;
4. The participants’ agenda as a whole moved toward the leaders’ agenda in the pivotal final two weeks of the campaign.

Together, this evidence points toward an image of voters with open, vague and ‘floating’ preferences, whose views are amenable to persuasion by leaders and parties – more in line with the neo-elitist model than with the aggregative-pluralist model. On the evidence provided, the elitist account of the electoral campaign is the more plausible.

However, one should also mention some important assumptions and provisos that may affect the evidence and interpretation of this chapter. The assumption made throughout is that media messages are received and interpreted in a straightforward way by participants; little attention is paid to the contingent nature of media reception. Livingston (1998[2008]: 4) writes that the field of audience reception studies has advanced communications research beyond the assumptions of linear transmission of media messages to a passive and undifferentiated audience. Instead, this research emphasises the plurality of audiences, and displays sensitivity to cultural context. Moreover, there is little notion in my research of media outlets and journalists as independent actors. In Australia, Young (2011) has dedicated particular attention to the interaction of politicians and political journalists, noting that their relationship is one of tense exchange. Journalists can bribe, flatter, blackmail and threaten their sources. Indeed, Savva (2010: 55, cited in Young 2011: 122) argues that “journalists ‘win hands down’ over politicians when it comes to ‘scheming and lying, plain old hypocrisy and dishonesty...apart from a few honourable exceptions’.”

While I acknowledge the independent role of media, it is important to note that neither the elitist nor aggregative-pluralist approach systematically address the role of the mass media in contemporary electoral communication and competition. The first step toward filling this gap is examining how the approaches fare with some fairly simple assumptions. In my research, I have assumed media are channels of communication between leaders and voters, even though any comprehensive account would treat media as actors in their own right. On the issue of reception, the use of qualitative analysis (*vis-à-vis* large scale survey analysis) can allow for some of the contingencies of media interpretation to be spelled out. There is room here for future research on social context. I return to this issue in the next – and final – chapter.

Chapter 6 – Discussion and Conclusions

In this thesis I have addressed the research question: which perspective is more plausible and which of the two models is more accurate – the *neo-elitist* or *aggregative-pluralist*? Using the 2010 Australian Federal Election as a case study, I undertook a mixed methods research project, using the Australian Election Study and the accompanying Australian Candidate Study to quantitatively analyse the *structure* of elite-voter relations, and qualitative analysis of political ‘logs’ kept during the campaign to analyse the *dynamics*.

In this final chapter, I summarise the study and the findings of my research and demonstrate how they advance our understanding of Australian democracy. The research findings are organised as brief responses to the key research questions. While I compare the usefulness of the neo-elitist and aggregative-pluralist approaches, I emphasise the relevance of the elitist perspective. Methodological reflections, suggestions for future research and a conclusion are also presented.

6.0.1. Approach

There were two main reasons for my selection of a mixed methods approach. First, mixed methods research provided me with more than one opportunity to test the two perspectives. As mentioned previously, there are no critical tests available to decide the superiority of either the neo-elitist or aggregative-pluralist account. Therefore, performing multiple indirect tests is preferable to performing one. More substantially, mixed methods research provided me with insight into both the *structure* of elite-voter relations (surveys) and their *dynamics* (political logs).

The survey analysis portion of my research focused on the concept of *attitudinal distance* – that is, how far apart are candidates and voters on a range of political issues – and draws out several expectations from each approach about how elite and voter views are structured. In particular, I examined the neo-elitist expectation that elites polarise strongly on *competition* issues, such as taxation, redistribution, and the role of unions, but de-emphasise *authority* issues such as reinstatement of the death penalty and whether lawbreakers should be given stiffer sentences.

Further, I examined these attitudes at three different points in time – 1990, 2001 and 2010 – which allowed me to identify any long-term change that may have taken place. Overall, my survey analysis provided three snapshots of elite-voter relations in Australia and thus, three opportunities to apply the neo-elitist and aggregative-pluralist perspectives to assess the plausibility of the competing models. It also allowed me to examine whether elite-voter relations have changed during the last 20 years, contributing to debates about elite fragmentation and polarisation.

This research used an innovative qualitative research technique that has no known precedent in political sociology or political science. Political logs are a hybrid between a small panel survey and a series of structured interviews. My use of this new methodology afforded some new insights into the interaction of leaders and voters. Most crucially, I discovered that voters invest trust in leaders, even when they criticise them. Contemporary quantitative analysis of voter decision-making is powerful and sophisticated (e.g. Lau and Redlawsk 2006), but to the extent that voting involves emotional reactions and investments such as trust or disgust, my research demonstrates that qualitative analysis has an important complementary role in understanding voter behaviour.

My analysis of the commissioned logs focused on the concept of voter *autonomy*, that is, independence of voters' views from elite persuasion (as reflected in media content). I examined the process of elite-voter interaction during the critical pre-election period: five weeks of official campaigning before the election and one week following the election. This intensive focus on the process of evaluation and decision-making allowed me to better understand this process and to place it in the context of the elite-voter interaction established by my survey analysis.

6.1. Key findings

How large are the political attitudinal distances between candidates ('elites') and partisan voters?

Mirroring the views of voters, it appears, is not an important condition for electoral success – a statement that is in keeping with the neo-elitist perspective. In general, Labor candidates were more 'left' than typical Labor voters and Coalition candidates were more 'right' than Coalition voters. On *authority* issues, Labor candidates were consistently more permissive

than voters, and Coalition candidates were more permissive only on the question of reinstating the death penalty. This was not symmetrical, however: Labor candidates were generally more attitudinally distant from their voters than were Coalition candidates.

How large are the political attitudinal distances between Labor and Coalition candidates ('elites'), and between Labor and Coalition voters?

Neo-elitists see leaders and elites as actively constructing and sustaining political differences and political outlooks. The data reveal a strong and robust pattern that persists across the sampled period that is in line with the neo-elitist approach. Partisan candidates were more strongly polarised than partisan voters on both *competition* and *authority* issues. From a possible 100 per cent, candidates were an average of 50 percentage points apart on *competition* issues, compared to 20 percentage points for voters. Candidates were between 20 and 30 percentage points apart on *authority* issues, compared to six to seven percentage points for voters.

Are candidates ('elites') and voters closer or more distant on competition or authority issues?

Another strong and robust finding that supports the neo-elitist model is that partisan candidates were systematically more distant from one another on *competition* issues than *authority* issues. From a possible 100 per cent, Labor and Coalition candidates were an average of 50 percentage points apart from one another on *competition* issues. In contrast, candidates were between 20 and 30 percentage points apart on *authority* issues.

How have the relationships between Labor and Coalition candidates ('elites') changed between 1990 and 2010?

In aggregate, Labor and Coalition candidates were approximately the same distance apart on *competition* issues for the entire sampled period. Between 1990 and 2010, there has been relatively little change in the attitudinal distances between candidates and voters. Most of the change that did take place occurred between 1990 and 2001; there were fewer changes between 2001 and 2010. On *competition* issues, most groups moved marginally leftward.

On *authority* issues, Labor and Coalition candidates moved closer together between 1990 and 2010. To a large extent this was driven by a more permissive attitude among Coalition candidates, with the largest changes occurring in their attitudes toward the death penalty and to sex and nudity in the media.

How politically aware are voters?

Approximately half of the participants in my political logs were assessed as having high political awareness, and the other half low. Around half the participants had a ‘pet’ issue which consumed most of their attention. The identification of pet issues by voters – and their apparent use as a method to filter campaign information and remain engaged – is a new finding, albeit another perspective on the existence of ‘issue publics’.

What level of political autonomy do voters possess?

With a few exceptions, participants generally possessed low political autonomy. There are four principal reasons for this assessment: 1) participants’ political information was almost always sourced from parties and leaders through mass media; 2) some participants had their pet issues swept away by the narratives of leaders; 3) participants mentioning ‘leadership’ referred to actions that aligned with pre-existing beliefs; and 4) the participants’ agenda moved toward the leaders’ agenda in the final two weeks of the campaign.

What range of media sources do voters use, and how does this reflect on their awareness and autonomy?

The results suggest that political parties and their leaders determine the political agenda, and that voters possess low autonomy. Participants routinely cited parties and leaders, as seen and heard in the media, as the source of the issues they were most concerned about. Participants mentioned using an average of 2.5 sources per week. Newspapers constituted 31 per cent of media mentions, and television another 31 per cent. Online sources made up 22 per cent of media sources, but a small minority of high-awareness participants accounted for these mentions.⁵¹

⁵¹ Radio (6 per cent) and friends and family (10 per cent) made up the remainder of mentions.

6.2. Elite-voter relations in Australia

The political elite members in Australia differ markedly in their attitudes, with their beliefs being structured strongly by party ideology and the strictures of competing for power. In interpreting this pattern, elitists are unconcerned. While disagreement about potentially divisive *authority* issues is still high, this disagreement is voluntarily moderated and the issues are left undiscussed. Elite-voter political attitudes form a V pattern across several dimensions. In the first dimension, candidates are more ideologically distant from one another than are voters, consistent with Putnam's (1976) and McAllister's (1991) observations. Unlike voters, political elites are organised into parties whose express goal is to win federal elections. *This necessitates a high level of ideological organisation and consistency.* Additionally, Australia's Westminster parliamentary system means that party discipline is high, exacerbating this pattern of ideological organisation. Approaching this pattern from the opposite direction, public opinion researchers such as Converse (1964) and Zaller (1992) see voters (the mass) as lacking ideological constraint. Voters' political attitudes are less likely to be driven by party platforms than by emotional attachments to social groupings, common sense arguments, and 'top of the head' considerations.

The second V is formed by the relatively high polarisation of partisan candidates on *competition* issues such as taxation, redistribution and union activity, compared to their lower polarisation on *authority* issues such as the death penalty, sentencing, and marijuana legalisation. This V is critical in neo-elitist theory, as they are indicative of a high level of inter-elite trust and commitment to the rules of the game symptomatic of a *consensual unified elite* (Field and Higley 1980; Higley, Deacon and Smart 1979; Higley and Burton 2006). The main feature of this elite structure is its peaceable resolution of conflict and disagreement. The losing side of an electoral contest is reintegrated into the elite structure; in the case of a Westminster system such as Australia, they are reintegrated in the form of a loyal opposition. This reintegration contrasts strongly with *ideological unified* and *disunified* elite structures, where losing elite groups are cast out or even killed.

Crucially, the de-polarisation of *authority* issues found in my data is not an accident. In the neo-elitist account, rival elites voluntarily moderate their conflicts and rivalries in the interests of political stability. Elites recognise the right of oppositions to exist, to be heard, and to bargain, and emphasise technical and procedural feasibilities over principled ethical positions (Di Palma 1973, cited in Best and Higley 2010a: 8). Elites take publicly opposed

positions while continuing to respect existing institutions and procedures, “[making] this kind of elite compatible with a fairly wide degree of representative democratic politics” (Field and Higley 1980: 37).

A third V is discernable between the *authority* attitudes of candidates and voters. This pattern demonstrates two important points from the neo-elitist perspective. First, it demonstrates the breadth of ideological consistency of partisan elites. Even on issues that are not subject to electoral competition, partisan elites exhibit substantial (but reduced) difference. Second, this pattern demonstrates the default, ‘disorganised’ state of voter attitudes. When an issue is absent from media and from the polarising cues given by partisan elites, there is comparatively little to separate voters who identify with one party from another. The fourth V between voter *competition* and *authority* issues further illustrates this point: the cues available from partisan elites allow voters to polarise on *competition* issues, but the relative absence of information on where elites stand on *authority* issues means partisan voters have little to separate them.

This picture matches that of Higley and his colleagues (1979) some 30 years earlier. For Higley and colleagues, issue conflicts within the Australian elite “are as much the symbolic and ritualistic components of a tightly set political game as they are the deep convictions of those who express them” (Higley et al. 1979: 144). They are based on the “unspoken but pervasive assumption that it is a useful and reasonably efficient way of processing problems and issues without allowing them to have mortal consequences for any elite person or faction” (Higley et al. 1979: 144). While this means that ideal representations of democracy are misleading, it does not mean democracy is a sham. Rather, it is the safety and well-being of elites that, once secured in a consensual unified elite structure, allows representative democratic politics to emerge. Importantly, this general picture has not changed over the last generation. On the contrary, it became a clear and lasting feature of the Australian political scene, as well as other advanced democracies (Higley and Burton 2006; Best and Higley 2010b).

At the active end of the electoral relationship are the political elites who (with the help of political leaders and media and strategic advisors) influence the electoral news agenda and the attitudes of voters. At the reactive end of the electoral relationship lie the voters. Even when they identify with a party, voters are less organised and less polarised in their beliefs

than are elites. Voters take cues from political elites on publicly-discussed issues, hence their moderate degree of polarisation on *competition* issues. However, the absence of discussion of *authority* issues leaves voter attitudes in a disorganised state. In the four V's that form the attitudinal structure of Australian elite-voter relations, voter attitudes form the de-polarised base.

The qualitative analysis of the logs written by participants demonstrated that they generally possess a low level of political autonomy. Even the relatively highly-educated, interested and well-informed voters in my convenience sample had little autonomy – they followed the political agenda set forth by elites, rather than exhibiting a unique and independent view. This limited autonomy does not make them political dupes, however. Even in the information age, interested and informed citizens routinely use elite-dominated channels of information and persuasion, but this persuasion is provided in a competitive manner as part of electoral competition. In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that my participants regularly cited parties and leaders as the main source of the issues they were most concerned about. The use of pet issues helped participants cut down on the 'noise' in this competitive persuasion environment, but on some occasions this left them liable to make vote-changing decisions based on 'soundbites' or key campaign messages repeated by leaders.

According to contemporary elitist accounts, investments of public trust are a vital part of the democratic process (Best and Higley 2010b; Pakulski and Körösenyi 2012). I argue that there is an important tension within voters' understanding of the electoral process which is an important dynamic in contemporary democracy. On the one hand, a large minority of voters expressed disappointment and cynicism toward the electoral campaign, calling it 'poor', 'boring', and 'lame', and as focusing too much on appearance and too little on policy substance. While these are common themes in critiques of contemporary electoral campaigns, the 2010 federal campaign was singled out for particularly harsh criticism (Megalogenis 2010; Gaita 2010; Willingham 2010; *Sydney Morning Herald* 2010). On the other hand, participants regularly referred to leaders as the persons in whom they invest trust, or as the persons who engendered other emotional evaluations such as respect. While voters may indeed be the *reactive* element of the leader-voter relationship, they are not completely passive.

6.3. The two perspectives compared

The picture emerging from these analyses is more *neo-elitist* than *aggregative-pluralist*. Elites control the issue agendas and the main interpretive frames. The political attitudes of elites are more structured by party ideology and a high level of education than by electoral competition – the strong polarisation of *competition* issues negates the process of median voter approximation that is vital to the aggregative-pluralist approach. Indeed, while Labor was further from the mean voter view in all three sampled years, it won the 1990 election and formed minority government in 2010 (with a slim two-party preferred majority). This in itself implies that further social-political processes must be invoked to properly explain the electoral process in Australia. On a separate note, the gap between elite and voter attitudes is not a temporary one that can be bridged by additional education, as is implicit in the classical democratic account; belonging to the political elite in itself is a powerful influence on political attitudes, and one's partisanship determines the direction of this influence.

Further, interest aggregation and interest groups do play an important role in the political process. People naturally seek to maximise their interest in concert with like-minded others, making conflict inevitable. It is the resulting configuration of countervailing interest groups and dispersed power that is a key aspect of the aggregative-pluralists' idealised and benign 'bottom-up' view of contemporary representative democracy. Because of the strong electoral focus of my research, it was impossible to assess conclusively these general aspects of the aggregative-pluralist perspective. There was also no attempt to assess the social-structural sources of citizen preferences, which is important to the 'aggregative' portion of the approach. Finally, there was no assessment of the level of autonomy of leaders from voters, although their relative autonomy is implied from its absence in voters.

This research not only demonstrates the higher plausibility of the neo-elitist perspective, but also adds substantially to the elitist understanding of democracy by fleshing out the process of leader-voter interaction. Voters with pet issues, I suggest, can be understood as members of 'issue publics' holding fragmentary or incomplete attitudes. They seek out information on this issue and possibly become involved, but otherwise their involvement in politics is relatively narrow (Converse 1964). Leaders compete to actively secure their vote. They seek to collect groups of these issue publics – through persuasion, demagoguery or even plain deception – to form a coalition that will win office. Voters are open to such persuasions, but they are not completely malleable. They possess general inclinations, orientations and

systematic biases that make certain combinations more likely than others.⁵² Leaders float issues and policies, experimenting with different combinations of policies and appeals in order to maximise their vote and gain leadership of the state.

The neo-elitist model, while more plausible, needs further development and clarification. There is substantial room to add more information on non-elite predispositions without impinging on the theoretical prominence of elite autonomy. First, there is substantial evidence that social cleavages continue to exert influences upon voting behaviour (Brooks, Nieuwbeerta and Manza 2006), which adds considerable detail to our understanding of how social structure influences politics. Second, analysis of the role of rhetoric in maintaining democratic leadership (e.g. Kane and Patapan 2012: ch. 4) shows that the democratic norm of popular sovereignty places significant restrictions on the behaviour of leaders. Laying bare the implicit ground rules improves our understanding of democracy as a leadership competition by further reinforcing the notion that it is an extra-constitutional affair.

Finally, while conducting this research, I encountered some findings that partly contradict neo-elitist portrayals of Australian politics. In contrast with the accounts of Australian elite polarisation (Higley and Burton 2006: 190; Higley and Pakulski 2008), I find little evidence that elite conflict in 2010 was more fractious or contentious than it was during the 1980s and 1990s. While Higley and Burton (2006: 190) argue that the ascension of John Howard to the Prime Ministership in 1996 marked the beginning of a period of more forceful elite rule, my data point to little change. Coalition elites in particular were equally permissive in 2001 as they were in 1990, and became more marginally more permissive in 2010. Such contradictory evidence should caution elitists against overstating the uniqueness and intensity of Australian elite conflict in the new century. It is important to reiterate, however, that these findings concern particular neo-elitist diagnoses of historical trends, rather than their overall perspective.

6.4. Methodological reflections and future research

Undertaking research is always easier with the benefit of hindsight, and this project is no different. While throughout this thesis some constraints and suggestions have been

⁵² On social-psychological biases in voter opinion, see Kuklinski and Quirk (2000).

mentioned, where appropriate, several aspects require further discussion. These refer to aspects of the methodology utilised and also the role of media in leader-voter interaction.

The most important aspect of the research that can be improved upon is the wording of the questions asked in the political logs. In general, the questions were too wordy and had the possibility of confusing participants as to what was asked of them. The second regular question in particular is problematic,⁵³ as it suggests political figures or groups as the appropriate sources of information and could be regarded as a form of begging the question. A better phrasing for this question might be: “How did this issue come to your attention?”

Another key methodological qualification is that there are no decisive tests that could conclusively verify or falsify any of the two models or perspectives. They are too general, too complex, too multifaceted, too paradigmatic to be tested in a completely conclusive manner. Yet their relative plausibility can be assessed – and this is what my research has attempted.

6.4.1. Understanding the media

An important aspect arising from this research that needs further consideration is the role of media in leader-voter interaction. To point out the highly mediated relationship between elites and voters is to state a truism. Some observers may note that my research uses a simplistic approach to media and its role in leader-voter interaction, but this is a little misleading. In the elite-voter scheme I have presented, accounts of media are modular – they can be inserted or removed based on their feasibility. Thomas Meyer (2002), for example, argues that media has ‘colonised’ contemporary democratic politics by making it function according to its rules. Central to this account is the ‘theatricalization’ of news, wherein news articles increasingly take on the characteristics of entertainment, becoming stage-managed to ensure an easily digestible format. Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult for citizens to cross-check political information with real life experiences, as political events become increasingly stage-managed (Meyer 2002: 75). Meyer (2002:101) contrasts “the marketplace of ancient assembly democracy” with contemporary “media democracy”, wherein the media-dominated public sphere functions as a very exclusive public stage; access is restricted to experts and elites (Meyer 2002: 99). The emphasis upon performance in media democracy means that voters tend to place emphasis on candidates and leaders as artists rather than

⁵³ The question reads: “Who – that is, which political figure or group – signalled these issues? What was/were the main source(s) of your information on this issue (e.g. Internet news/blogs, *The Australian*, *The Mercury*, *Win News*, conversation with friends)?”

politicians. Deliberation and participation are sidelined in favour of catering to the transitory opinions of the public.

From the elitist perspective I adopt, Meyer's (2002) account places too much emphasis on the importance of citizen deliberation and participation. These qualities are thought to be absent from citizens, and should be kept in check, lest government comes to a standstill (through excessive deliberation) or becomes unstable and chaotic (through excessive participation). Meyer does not acknowledge that the exclusive nature of the media stage is generally beneficial to elites,⁵⁴ and is at least partially by their design. Nevertheless, Meyer is correct in highlighting three principal consequences of the media-dominated democratic era: the sidelining of political parties and intermediary organisations in favour of leaders; the reification of the momentary preferences of isolated citizens; and the elevation of issue-less stage-management (Meyer 2002: 139).

The fact remains that neither of the perspectives I evaluated – the neo-elitist nor aggregative approach – directly responds to the media or the highly mediated electoral age, much to their discredit. While media have been studied in detail, political sociological theories have “failed to integrate the media as an oblique force that has strong but not always clear impacts on political candidates, elections, ideologies, and legislation, and on the implementation and evaluation of policy” (Hicks, Janoski and Schwartz 2005: 2). More specifically, neither approach has concrete expectations about how voters understand and use media sources. In his extensive overviews of the pluralist and elitist models, Held (2006) makes no mention of media. Field and Higley (1980: 19-20) regard voters (non-elites) as holders of general inclinations based on the level of societal development. While elites must consider and appeal to these inclinations in justifying policies, they more determine what cannot or will not happen at each level of societal development. While it is true that media in the late 1970s were substantially less developed, no attention is given to media in later work (e.g. Higley and Burton 2006). Pakulski and Körösenyi (2012) regard the contemporary era of ‘leader democracy’ as one of media centrality, but their focus is on the oratory charisma of leaders using mass media as a mouthpiece. Their treatment of media is otherwise superficial. It has

⁵⁴ The Gillard Labor government was an exception to this. Media commentators frequently referred to the government's inability to ‘cut through’ or ‘sell its achievements’. At the same time, government ministers criticised media coverage for its disinterest in covering policy (e.g. Ireland 2013; Massola and Vasek 2013).

been left to public opinion scholars sympathetic with the elite perspective to better understand media (e.g. Zaller 1992).

Where elitists such as Pakulski and Körösenyi (2012) understand media as a tool at the disposal of leaders, Meyer (2002) is representative of the view that media is a powerful independent actor, capable of dominating politics and transforming it in a negative way. Further addressing the place and role of media will allow future researchers to produce a more comprehensive theory of contemporary democracy.

6.5. Conclusion: The relevance of the neo-elitist perspective

The importance of this research lies not only in its innovative approach, but also in its relevance to political sociology. The picture presented here differs sharply from more mainstream accounts of Australian politics. With some notable exceptions cited above, most political analyses in Australia seem to embrace the aggregative-pluralist model and an institutional (rather than elite) focus. In his review of the Australian study of elections and electoral behaviour, McAllister (2009) notes the strong institutional focus of scholars studying Australian electoral practices. Australia's distinctive features, such as its compulsory voting, have been a particularly strong interest for researchers. On the other hand, Higley and Pakulski (2000[2012]) note numerous confusions and prejudices about elites and elitism. While the key political figures are regularly mentioned in mainstream accounts, and media coverage focuses on the top political players, the elitist perspective, it seems, is a rare guest in studies of Australian politics, including electoral contests.⁵⁵

Contemporary normative descriptions of, and prescriptions for, Australian democracy are distinctly anti-elitist. Perhaps the largest and highest-profile evaluation of the quality of Australian democracy is *Australia: the State of Democracy* (Sawer, Abjorensen and Larkin 2009).⁵⁶ The implicit understanding of democracy in the work of Sawer and her colleagues is both pluralist and 'maximalist': any institution that is plausibly involved with government

⁵⁵ Indeed, elitism sits on the outside of the mainstream of Australian political scholarship. 'Elites' and 'elitism' are mentioned a total of four times in Rhodes's 500-page edited book *The Australian Study of Politics* (2009), mostly in passing.

⁵⁶ *The State of Democracy* is a systematic and comprehensive audit of Australian democratic practice based on topical sub-audits from a wide range of authors, pioneered in the United Kingdom by Beetham, Byrne and Ngan (2002). Using the four values of *popular control of government*, *political equality*, *civil liberties and human rights*, and *quality of public debate and discussion*, Sawer and colleagues evaluate the extent to which these values are realised in a wide variety of government institutions.

and that could be a conduit for democratic values is subject to examination.⁵⁷ Likewise, the slow uptake of deliberative processes is understood as a weakness in government responsiveness. Many of the solutions to weaknesses of Australian democratic institutions, as Sawyer and colleagues understand them, are aimed at limiting the autonomy of elites.

The evidence presented in this thesis suggests that elites play a central role in Australian democracy, and that this central role should be clearly recognised. Beyond the institutions that compose it, central to Australian democracy is a social process where – in a strategic competition for control of the state – leaders attempt to persuade voters to invest their trust in them. Voters, in turn, must decide in whom they will invest this trust. Moreover, this relationship is asymmetrical and elite-dominated. While a substantial proportion of the electorate may be well-informed, voters generally lack the autonomy to be the prime mover in the electoral process.

Not only is the elitist account of the electoral process more plausible than the competing aggregative-pluralist perspective, but it is highly compatible with the *revised standards* for citizens set by Michael Schudson (1998).⁵⁸ Schudson argues that the model of the ‘Active Citizen’ that is implicit in most understandings of democracy should be revised in light of the observed limited capabilities and interests of citizens.⁵⁹ He states that citizens should be ‘monitorial’ and defensive rather than proactive:

[the] monitorial citizen engages in environmental surveillance rather than information-gathering. Picture parents watching small children at the community pool. They are not gathering information; they are keeping an eye on the scene. They look inactive, but they are poised for action if action is required. The monitorial citizen is not an absentee citizen but watchful, even while he or she is doing something else (Schudson 1998: 311).

Along similar lines, Zaller (2003) has forwarded a revised standard of news quality to complement the model of monitorial citizens. The ‘Full News standard’ that accompanies the active citizen model stipulates that political news should consist of “sober, detailed, and comprehensive coverage of public affairs,” and “ought to be doing much more to provide

⁵⁷ For example, the chapter on economic and social rights takes issue with workforce casualisation, the lack of universal statutory paid maternity leave, and the gap in pay between males and females, among several other problems (Sawyer et al. 2009: ch. 4).

⁵⁸ Schudson (1998) and Zaller (2003) have been briefly covered in the Australian context by Young (2011).

⁵⁹ Schudson’s concept of the monitorial citizen echoes, but does not draw upon, the assumptions and findings from behavioural economics and psychology which suggest that humans have a “limited capacity for fully informed and synoptic decision making” (Zaller 2003: 119).

citizens with the ‘raw material’ to develop their own opinions on important matters” (Zaller 2003: 115-6). However, additional information rarely makes people change their mind, but seems to increase partisanship. It is low and moderate information voters who tend to be the most volatile (Zaller 2003: 116-7; Zaller 1996). Moreover, this standard was formulated during the late 19th century, when maintaining a full brief of public affairs was far more achievable for an interested citizen (Zaller 2003: 114). In its place, Zaller proposes the ‘burglar alarm’ standard of news that aims to capture and maintain citizen attention:

Journalists should routinely seek to cover non-emergency but important news by means of coverage that is intensely focused, dramatic, and entertaining and that affords the parties and responsible interest groups...ample opportunity for expression of opposing views. Reporters may use simulated drama to engage public attention when the real thing is absent (Zaller 2003: 122).

While Zaller pits the two news standards against one another, the two standards are better thought as interacting with one another, and as generally compatible with a broad elite perspective. The Full News standard remains important to journalists in particular because: (i) ‘burglar alarms’ – in the form of soft news and sensationalism – are perpetually sounding; and (ii) the absence of an alarm implies that politics is working as intended, when this is often not the case. If journalists were to use the Full News standard to screen events, it would make the sounding of false alarms less likely (Bennett 2003: 136). The concepts of the burglar alarm and the monitorial citizen draw attention to one important fact: a functioning democracy does not require superhuman informational and evaluative skills from its citizens. Elite behaviour will always be central to the attention of elite scholars, but the addition of these standards will afford them two tools when evaluating news production and voter behaviour.

A further aspect of elitism that awaits development concerns the role of effective leadership.⁶⁰ Elitists dismiss the normative concerns of pluralist, participatory and deliberative democrats, and assume a sober and descriptive standpoint. At the same time, they also claim that the qualities of leaders matter (Schumpeter 1942: 288ff; Pakulski and Körösiényi 2012). It is unrealistic to assume that electoral competition will necessarily select high quality leaders. Just as markets suffer from the distorting effects of monopoly, “some political competitors enjoy inherited privileges, grossly unequal funding, celebrity status,

⁶⁰ See, for example, Walter’s (2012) review of Pakulski and Körösiényi (2012).

dynastic family names, or other big advantages, [meaning] leaders and elites of high quality are hardly assured by competitive elections” (Best and Higley 2010a: 5). This leaves elitism in a precarious position, accepting leadership as an important elite integrator and the main generator of electoral authorisation, but offering no analysis of its role and no normative guide for its assessment.

Leaders and elites are the key political actors in Australian democracy. They run the show, but they do it in line with the rules, norms and conventions of the democratic elite game. This means that they are competitive, partisan and critical of each other’s political strategies – but within the limits accepted by all elite political game-players. While they pay their respects publically to voters, they attempt to maximise public trust and confidence in their rule by using persuasion, demagoguery, selective information and – occasionally – deception and outright lies. If this is an ugly picture of democratic politics, it is nevertheless – as my research suggests – also quite a realistic picture, and in line with the neo-elitist portrayal of contemporary elite democracy.

6.5.1. The Australian democratic malaise

Finally, it is important to return to the contemporary Australian feeling of democratic malaise. The 2010 Federal election campaign was widely criticised by commentators as the worst in living memory – a ‘trivial pursuit’ (Megalogenis 2010). Both leaders “eschewed any detailed discussion of policy and announcements and debates were designed to minimize risk and maximize their utility for the mass media” (McAllister, Bean and Pietsch 2011: 10). In response, many voters responded by abstaining. Informal voting increased and turnout decreased over 2007 (Steel 2010; AEC 2012).⁶¹ Voter turnout for the House of Representatives was the lowest since the introduction of compulsory voting in 1924, and the lowest for the Senate since 1928 (AEC 2012).

Media coverage of Australian politics is regularly thought to be excessively poll-driven. Mills and Tiffen (2012: 165-8) argue that it is impossible to explain the extraordinary events and outcome of the 2010 election without reference to opinion polling – and its detrimental impact on leadership. Poor numbers in opinion polls were critical in the replacement of Kevin Rudd with Julia Gillard (and in Kevin Rudd’s recent reprisal of the leadership), and

⁶¹ Senate turnout in 2010 was 93.83 per cent of enrolled voters compared to 95.17 in 2007. House of representatives turnout in 2010 was 93.22 per cent compared to 94.76 in 2007 (AEC 2012).

subsequent media attention speculated on Gillard's 'honeymoon' period or 'bounce' in the polls. Polling numbers were also used by both parties during minority government negotiations as evidence that they should be the ones to form government. This level of attention to polling is unprecedented, with more polls reported in a wider variety of media outlets, "their findings scrutinized more intensely, than ever before in Australian history" (Mills and Tiffen 2012: 171). As Peter Brent (2007: 131) argues, "there must be some countries more obsessed with political opinion polls than Australia, although they're yet to be found."⁶²

This recent preoccupation with polling is couched in a generalised dissatisfaction with democratic practice in many advanced democracies. As Dalton (2004: 191) concludes: "By almost any measure, public confidence and trust in, and support, for politicians, political parties, and political institutions has eroded over the past generation." Declining trust, combined with the strong and rising aspirations of an increasingly educated electorate, creates 'critical citizens' (Norris 1999). While her later work reveals no secular downward trend in support for democracy, Norris (2011: ch. 10) found that a government's performance of democratic *process* (maintaining proper democratic and governance procedures) helped to explain citizens' dissatisfaction with democracy. Through this lens opinion polling is an improper method of generating and implementing government policy.

Nevertheless, there are important tensions in the reliance on focus groups and opinion polling that suggest it is reaching its logical conclusion, despite discouraging signs during the 2013 election campaign. The need for sincerity in establishing trust demonstrated in this thesis suggests that the *process* violation involved in excessive polling mean it is unlikely to continue unabated. This form of highly *responsive* (vis-à-vis *responsible*) populism is antithetical to elite autonomy, and therefore to effective elite rule. There are also other reasons to be sanguine about the prospects for Australian democracy. While there is much work to be done from the maximalist democrat's perspective (see Sawyer et al. 2009), the

⁶² This evaluation is not unique to the 2010 election, but it is a surprisingly recent phenomenon. Sally Young (2010: 186) traces the majority of the growth in polling to the 2007 election. Young found that 44 per cent of newspaper articles and 35 per cent of television news reports quoted opinion polls in 2007 – a sudden and remarkable jump from around 10 per cent of newspaper articles in 2001 and 2004, and five per cent or less for television. This is matched by the account of journalist George Megalogenis (2010: 29), whose *Australian* newspaper published 161 articles mentioning opinion polls in the final three months of Rudd's prime ministership and 167 three months before the 2007 election, compared with 52 and 46 for the 2004 and 2001 campaigns respectively.

relative stability of elite consensus demonstrated in this thesis suggests that there is no looming democratic crisis, despite the current period of highly personal politics (e.g. Kane, Rhodes and Tiernan 2012). It is always important to note, however, that any speculation about the future should be strongly tempered with the qualification that this sort of reconfiguration is in the hands of elites.

This research has determined that the neo-elitist perspective offers a provocative and critical approach to contemporary democracy. It points to the need for a wide recognition of elites, their role as democratic rulers and in sustaining viable democracy, and their need for relative autonomy from the public. This autonomy cannot be excessively restricted without elites losing their authority and responsibility. Dependent elites – those exposed to the pressures of external interests – are hindered from ruling effectively. Moreover, holding elites responsible for their actions when they are not autonomous becomes increasingly difficult. It is quite plausible that a large portion of current dissatisfaction and widespread sense of malaise reflects declining elite autonomy and the absence of effective leadership. While the focus of this research is on the interpretation of political competition in Australia, it also offers a broader critical perspective on contemporary democracy and the political elites that drive it.

Chapter 7 – Appendices

Appendix A. The Australian Election Studies and Australian Candidate Studies.

The quantitative analyses in Chapter 4 rely on six surveys: The Australian Election Studies (AES) from the years 1990, 2001 and 2010, and the Australian Candidate Studies (ACS) from the same years. The AES are nationally representative cross-sectional surveys timed to coincide with Australian Federal Elections. The series began in 1987, making the 2010 AES the ninth in the series. The studies use a stratified systematic sample using the Commonwealth Electoral Roll as a frame. The sample is selected to be proportional to the population on a state-by-state basis. The 1990 and 2001 AES were entirely conducted on a self-completed mail out – mail back basis, whereas the 2010 AES allowed respondents to complete the questionnaire via hardcopy or online using a unique password.

The 2010 AES has a total of 2214 cases, 2003 of which were obtained during the initial mail-out of 4999, yielding an adjusted response rate of 42.5% (following the removal of out of scope population, such as deceased, incapable, return to sender). The original mail-out was followed by three reminder/thankyou postcards across the next six weeks to minimise losses. The initial mail-out had a bias that resulted in an underrepresentation of younger voters, and a booster sample was drawn to correct for this bias. In the first stage of the booster sample, respondents were recruited from previous research projects via telephone to complete the questionnaire online. From a total of 1015 calls, 129 respondents completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 12.7%. In the second stage of the booster sample, age-qualified persons were contacted via email using the MyOpinions online panel as a frame. The required 82 completed surveys were achieved with a total of 1002 email invitations, yielding a response rate of 8.2%. The dataset provided a weighting variable to adjust for these sample biases, which weighted by sex, age, state/territory and 2010 voting behaviour respectively. This weighting variable was used for all analyses involving the dataset.

The 1990 AES has a total of 2037 cases, and the 2001 AES has a total of 2010. The 2001 survey was followed by four reminder/thankyou postcards or letters in the three months following the original mailout to minimise losses. No information regarding response rates is available in either case.

While the Candidate Studies are a companion to the Electoral Studies, and use many of the same questions in a cross-sectional survey, they do not use the same sampling procedure. The 1990 ACS has 429 cases selected from ‘viable’ candidates for the Federal election. Candidates were eligible for selection if they were either: 1) endorsed candidates of the Labor Party, Liberal Party, National Party, Australian Democrats, and the Nuclear Disarmament Party; 2) candidates with labels explicitly identifying them as environmentally concerned (except the Australian Green Party; 3) candidates who were endorsed by significant Green pressure groups; or 4) other candidates who it was anticipated would obtain more than 10 per cent of the first preference vote. The original mail-out was followed by reminder/thankyou postcard one week later, and an individually-addressed and signed follow-up letter was sent to non-respondents six weeks after the election, which re-stated the purposes of the study and emphasised the confidentiality of the questionnaire. No information is available about the response rate.

The 2001 ACS has 477 cases, and uses a similar universe, but has less emphasis on selecting environmentally oriented candidates. Their universe was ‘viable’ parliamentary candidates for the Federal election from Labor, Liberal, National, Democrat, the Greens and One Nation. The original mail-out was followed by a thankyou/reminder postcard after 15 days, and a second questionnaire was sent to non-respondents after six weeks. Again, no information is available on the response rate.

The 2010 ACS has 247 cases, but has a smaller universe comprising all candidates of the three major political parties – the Australian Labor Party, Liberal-National Coalition, and the Australian Greens. Postal addresses for candidates were obtained from the public domain, mostly from the internet. A thankyou/reminder postcard with questionnaire was sent to selected members a week after the original mail-out, and a third reminder questionnaire was posted three weeks later. The 247 cases were obtained from an initial mail-out of 543, yielding an adjusted response rate of 48.9% (following the removal of out of scope cases, such as deceased, incapable, return to sender).

Table 7.1 presents the number of cases and response rates for the six datasets described.

Table 7.1. Metadata for Australian Election and Candidate Studies, 1990-2010.

	Year	N	Adj. Response Rate
Election Studies	1990	2037	N/A
	2001	2010	N/A
			42.5%
	2010	2003	12.7% (first booster) 8.1% (second booster)
Candidate Studies	1990	429	none (universe)
	2001	477	N/A
	2010	247	48.9%

Appendix B. Example of agenda originality analysis.

The agenda originality analysis performed in Chapter 5 measured the extent to which agendas of participants and leaders converged during the election campaign.

The agendas of the political leaders – Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott – were ascertained by sampling their quotes and paraphrases from three daily newspapers across the six weeks of the campaign. *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* were sampled every second day of the period beginning on Monday 19 July; *The Age* was sampled every second day beginning on Tuesday 20 July. Each quote or direct paraphrase of a leader (meaning the article paraphrases the leader using the word “said”) was classified by its political topic. While most topics will be intuitive to the reader, the topic ‘leadership’ is a slightly broader category than its name implies. The category includes comments about the qualities of the leader or their opponent (e.g. their trustworthiness or effectiveness), comments about the parties as a whole, clichés that do not refer directly to a policy area (e.g. “moving forward”), and other topics that do not refer directly to a policy area (e.g. when Abbott disendorsed a candidate for making racist comments in the second week). Participants were asked each week to list a maximum of two issues that they considered important. These issues were then categorised in the same manner as those of leaders.

For leaders, the agenda for each week was determined by calculating the quotes and paraphrases from each topic as a proportion of all quotes from that week. The participants’ agenda was determined by calculating each topic’s share of the total topic mentions. For each topic, the participants’ topic share is subtracted from the leaders’ topic share, creating an agenda difference for each topic (agenda topics whose share is below 5% for both groups are excluded). The sum of these differences (which is calculated using absolute values) is then halved to create an *agenda originality* figure, where 0% denotes that leader and participant agendas are completely identical, and 100% denotes that the agendas are completely different.

Table 7.2 presents a fully worked example of the agenda convergence analysis from Week 1 of the campaign (19-25 July). To illustrate, Population/Immigration occupied 32 per cent of the leaders’ agenda, and 10 per cent of the participants’ agenda, making the difference 22 per

cent. The sum of these differences is halved to make a *convergence* figure because the initial sum can range from 0-200.

Table 7.2. Example of Agenda Convergence (Week 1 - 19 - 25 July).

All leaders	Mentions	Percent	Participants	Issues	Percent	Difference
Population/Immigration	61	32%	Population/Immigration	3	10%	22%
Leadership	34	18%	---	0	0%	18%
Economic Management	33	17%	Economic Management	2	6%	11%
Climate Change	25	13%	Climate Change	5	16%	3%
Asylum Seekers	14	7%	Asylum Seekers	3	10%	3%
Workplace Relations	14	7%	Workplace relations	1	3%	4%
Foreign Affairs	7	4%	---	0	0%	---
<i>Mining Tax</i>	3	2%	<i>Mining Tax</i>	1	3%	---
Education	1	1%	Education	4	13%	12%
---	0	0%	Environment	3	10%	10%
---	0	0%	Health	3	10%	10%
---	0	0%	<i>Aged pension</i>	1	3%	---
---	0	0%	<i>Energy prices</i>	1	3%	---
---	0	0%	<i>Family breakdown</i>	1	3%	---
---	0	0%	<i>Housing</i>	1	3%	---
---	0	0%	<i>Law and order</i>	1	3%	---
---	0	0%	<i>Mental Health</i>	1	3%	---
	192	100%		31	100%	
				Sum		93
				Originality		46.5%

Appendix C. Illustration of convergence of linear and ordinal models.

In the Data and Methods chapter I described discarding ordinal regression in favour of linear regression for my survey analysis, on the grounds that linear regression would greatly aid interpretation and yield similar results. Table 7.3 below presents the coefficients from an example linear regression of voters' taxation attitudes in 2010, and Table 7.4 presents odds ratios from the corresponding ordinal regression. In Table 7.3, each year increase in age decreases respondents' score by 0.9 percentage points (remembering that the possible score ranges from 0-100, where 0 means Strongly Agree). Conversely, in Table 7.4, each year increase in age makes the respondent .7 per cent less likely to belong to a higher response category ($1/.993 = 1.007$). As a second example, in Table 7.3 Labor identifiers score 5.5 percentage points higher than the Coalition reference category; in Table 7.4 Labor identifiers are 44 per cent more likely to belong to a higher response category.

Table 7.3. High income tax makes people less willing to work hard - 2010 voters (coefficients).

(Constant)	35.37***
Other ID	6.91***
Labor ID	5.45***
Males	-5.16***
Age (years)	-0.9**
Bachelor's degree or higher	5.01***
r ²	0.04

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Source: McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011).

Table 7.4. High income tax makes people less willing to work hard - 2010 voters (odds ratios).

Other ID	1.50***
Labor ID	1.44***
Males	1.43***
Age (years)	.993**
Bachelor's degree or higher	1.38***
Nagelkerke r ²	0.04

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Source: McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2011).

Appendix D. Participant political log instruments.

Below I present the Information Sheet, Consent Form, an example question set, and Debriefing Interview Schedule from my political logs (in order). My research was given approval from the University of Tasmania's Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (project code H11235).

The example questions are from the fourth week of the participant logs. Each of the six weeks had a core set of four questions asking about their most important issues, how they sourced information about these issues, who has the best solutions or policies, and how they rated the performance of the leaders over the last week. The questions were emailed to participants in a basic Microsoft Word document on the Wednesday and were due the following Sunday.

During the first week, I asked these additional questions:

5. Have you made up your mind about how you are going to vote? If so, for whom will you vote, and how strong is your commitment?
6. What is your opinion regarding the replacement of Kevin Rudd by Julia Gillard as Prime Minister? In your view, was this replacement proper, timely and beneficial?

During the fifth (election) week, I asked these additional questions:

(If you are completing your log before the election)

5. Which party (or candidate) do you intend to vote for in the House of Representatives (Lower House)? And for the Senate (Upper House)? Give an overall summary of your decision. If you have not yet decided, please describe what you are currently thinking.

(If you are completing your log after the election)

6. Which party (or candidate) did you vote for in the House of Representatives (Lower House)? And for the Senate (Upper House)? Give an overall summary of your decision.

The original information sheets reproduced here describe the study as consisting of eight fortnightly logs starting in June and ending in October 2010. This plan immediately changed when Julia Gillard replaced Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister in June 2010 and called an election five weeks later. I emailed the selected participants and described the revised plan of six weekly logs starting 19 July, and asked them to write on their Consent Forms (or via email if they had already consented) that they accepted the proposed changes.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

2010 Federal Election Study

Invitation

You are invited to participate in a research study into public opinion and voting intention during this year's Federal Election campaign. The study is a PhD project run by Chris Jones under the supervision of Prof. Jan Pakulski and A/Prof. Bruce Tranter in the School of Sociology and Social Work.

1. What is the purpose of this study?

The Study investigates changes in public opinion and voting intention during the 2010 Federal Election campaign (June/July-October).

2. What does my participation involve?

Participants in the study will be asked to complete (by email) a short (one page) questionnaire once a fortnight for eight fortnights, beginning in June-July and ending the week after the Federal Election (assuming the election is held in mid-October). It also involves a final "debriefing" interview that will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

I estimate that filling in each of the eight (8) one-page questionnaires should take about 15-20 minutes to fill in.

An email questionnaire will be sent several days in advance of the due date. The questions concern evaluations and opinions on election issues. The questionnaire **does not require any additional preparation**; in fact, we would appreciate if it **reflected your normal practices and normal thoughts** - not influenced by the Study.

All Participants will be anonymous and confidential. Data will be stored on a secure computer in a locked room at the University of Tasmania and used only for research purposes by myself and my supervisors.

3. Are there any benefits from participation in this study?

As a reward and incentive to complete the questionnaire, **I offer \$100 payment, but only to those respondents who complete and submit all eight responses.** This

payment will be available for collection from me following the final “debriefing” interview.

4. Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?

There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study. All Participants are free to withdraw from the Study at any time and for any reason, but if they do not complete the Study, they will forfeit the \$100 compensation.

5. Okay, what if I’d like to participate?

Please contact me via email at C.P.Jones@utas.edu.au as soon as possible expressing your interest.

You will need regular email access to your email address between now and just after the election (assumed to be Mid-October). I will send you a **very short screening questionnaire** asking for some background details, so we can select participants who fit the parameters of the Study.

Once you have been selected, please **sign the attached Consent Form** and return it to me at Private Bag 17, Hobart, Tasmania 7001.

I will then contact you several days before the first political log is due.

6. What if I have questions about this research?

Please do not hesitate to contact me or any of my academic supervisors if you need any more information about the Study. I prefer email contacts, but you can also call me on (03) 6226 2334 during working hours.

Email contacts:

Chris Jones (C.P.Jones@utas.edu.au);

Jan Pakulski (Jan.Pakulski@utas.edu.au);

Bruce Tranter (Bruce.Tranter@utas.edu.au)

Thank you for taking the time to consider this study.

Yours,

Chris Jones

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: **2010 Federal Election Study**

1. I have read and understood the 'Information Sheet' for this project.
2. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me, as well as the selection of Participants through the initial "screening" questionnaire.
3. I understand that the study involves investigating public opinion and voting intention in the period preceding and immediately after the 2010 Federal Election.
4. I understand that this Study requires me to complete a short (one page) email in response to structured questions once a fortnight for eight fortnights, beginning in June-July and ending the week after the Federal Election (assuming the election is held in mid-October). It also involves a final ("debriefing") interview.
5. I understand that I can claim \$100 compensation for my time and thoughts, but only if I complete and submit all eight responses.
6. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the University of Tasmania premises for until the thesis resulting from the project is published, and then the data will be destroyed.
7. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
8. I agree that research data gathered from me for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a participant.
9. I understand that the researchers will maintain my confidentiality and that any information I supply to the researcher(s) will be used only for the purposes of the research.
10. I agree to participate in this investigation and understand that I may withdraw at any time without any effect, and if I so wish, may request that any data I have supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

PLEASE TURN OVER

Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Statement by Investigator

☐ I have explained the project & the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

☐ The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Name of investigator _____

Signature of investigator _____ **Date** _____

Dear Respondent,

Here are the questions for this week's log. Please fill in your responses below each question. As a rough guide, write about one page (350 words) in total.

The period covered by this log is **9 – 15 August**.

Please submit this log by **15 August**.

Please make sure your logs do not miss out many days (e.g. if you fill in your logs on Thursdays, cover the week starting Friday the week before, and so on).

Please refrain from referring to previous logs when writing this one.

1. What do you consider as the most important issue(s) (up to two) in the current campaign? Comment briefly on why you see these issues as the most important, or concern you the most.

2. Who – that is, which political figure or group – signalled these issues? What was/were the main source(s) of your information on this issue (e.g. Internet news/blogs, The Australian, The Mercury, Win News, conversation with friends)?

3. In your opinion, who offers the best solutions or proposes the best policies on the most important issue(s)? Comment briefly what these solutions/policies involve.

4. How well do you think the following leaders have performed over the last week?

Julia Gillard:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	Not well at all										Very well	(No info)

Tony Abbott:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	Not well at all										Very well	(No info)

Bob Brown:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	Not well at all										Very well	(No info)

Thanks again for your time.

If you have any questions about the logs, or any part of the study, please contact me, Jan Pakulski (Jan.Pakulski@utas.edu.au), or Bruce Tranter (Bruce.Tranter@utas.edu.au).

Kind regards,

Chris Jones
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University of Tasmania

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www.utas.edu.au/sociology

DEBRIEFING INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
Title of Project: 2010 Federal Election Study

- 1. Some people vote for parties, some for leaders, some for policy issues, some for ideological reasons, some for local candidates, and others decide in the ballot box. In retrospect, how do you see the main reasons for voting the way you did?**

In general:

Parties taken as a whole:

Policy issues:

Ideological leanings:

Party leaders:

Local candidates:

- 2. (If foreshadows policy issues) You mentioned policy issues were important to you. In retrospect, what were the major issues of this election campaign, and how do you see them?**

Education:

National Broadband Network/Communications:

Economic management, stimulus and debt:

Immigration:

Refugees:

Health:

Other issues:

Leadership and leader change:

Party programs:

- 3. Would you remember when you made up your mind how you would vote?**

- 4. Any unclear sections of participants' logs that need clearing up.**

Debriefing

As you may have guessed, we've had to be a little coy about what we're actually studying.

The project as a whole investigates whether public opinion is independent or whether it reflects the pattern of political conflict.

What we're doing is comparing your logs to the media statements of political leaders to see how they correspond.

We're evaluating three competing theories: that public opinion mirrors leaders' statements, that leaders' statements mirror public opinion, and that the two vary independently.

Sorry for that minor deception, but if we had told you up front then it's likely that people would have gone out of their way to say something that leaders didn't.

Wrapping up

Is there anything else about the project you would like to know, or would like cleared up?

Would you like to be kept up to date about the results of the Study?

Appendix E. Attempts to replicate McAllister's (1991) second-order factor analysis

Of the 19 questions McAllister (1991) used from the 1987 Australian Election Study, 11 remained in 2010 (death penalty should be reintroduced for murder; Stiffer sentences for lawbreakers; Government should spend more on defence; Big business has too much power; Income and wealth should be redistributed; Trade unions have too much power; Stricter laws to regulate trade unions; Decriminalise smoking of marijuana; Sex and nudity in films and magazines have gone too far; Equal opportunities for women have gone too far; Aboriginal land rights have gone too far).

The first-order factor analysis, depicted in Table 7.5, used oblimin rotation because it was expected that these initial factors were correlated. The five factors that emerged can be interpreted as 'authority', 'redistribution', 'trade unions', 'permissiveness', and 'equality' respectively.

Table 7.5. Pattern matrix from first-order factor analysis of voter attitudes (2010).[†]

	Component				
	auth	redist	unions	permiss	equal
Death penalty reintroduced for murder	.743				
Stiffer sentences if break law	.710				
Government spend more on defence	.679				
Big business has too much power		.834			
Income and wealth should be redistributed		.798			
Trade unions have too much power			-.938		
Stricter laws to regulate trade unions			-.917		
Decriminalise smoking of marijuana				.831	
Nudity & sex in films and magazines				.712	
Equal opportunities for women					.914
Aboriginal land rights					.584

Source: McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2010).

[†] Pattern matrix from oblimin rotation shown. Loadings less than .4 have been suppressed for ease of interpretation.

The second-order factor analysis, however, did not create meaningful results (Table 7.6). While two factors emerged, most components loaded heavily on the first factor, and not in a manner that was expected. If an *authority* and an economically-based *competition* dimension were to emerge, we might expect union power to load on the *competition* dimension. Instead,

union power loaded with authority, equality and permissiveness, and redistribution loaded by itself on the second dimension.

Table 7.6. Second order factor analysis of voter attitudes (2010).

	Component	
	1	2
Union power	-.722	.903
Authority	.675	
Equality	.564	
Permissiveness	.494	
Redistribution		

Source: McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2010).

Appendix F. Inter-coefficient distances.

The data in Figures 4.1 through 4.5 are representations of *inter-coefficient distances*. These inter-coefficient distances are generated using standard linear regression models, with a number of additional control variables inserted.

To illustrate, Table 7.7 depicts the estimated scores of voters to the question: “Income and wealth should be redistributed toward ordinary working people”, where 0 means Strongly Agree and 100 means Strongly Disagree. Because Labor party identifiers and other identifiers (Greens, Democrats, no party, etc) have their own dummy variables, the constant refers to the model’s estimate for Coalition identifiers. The *inter-coefficient distance* between Labor and Coalition voters is therefore -22.1, or 22 per cent.

Table 7.7. Income and wealth should be redistributed toward ordinary working people (voters 1990).

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	53.597	2.396		22.374	.000
Other ID	-14.944	2.091	-.169	-7.148	.000
Labor ID	-22.121	1.480	-.353	-14.942	.000
Males	3.371	1.362	.054	2.474	.013
Age (years)	.075	.043	.039	1.746	.081
Bachelor's degree or higher	4.995	2.198	.050	2.273	.023
R square	0.119				

Source: McAllister, Jones, Papadakis and Gow (1990).

This figure, along with 47 others, went into Table 7.8 below, which is the master table used for my intra-status analyses in Figures 4.1 through 4.3. Table 7.9 contains all of the intra-party data (the inter-coefficient distances between candidates and voters from the same party).

Table 7.8. Inter-coefficient distances between partisan voters and partisan candidates.

	1990		2001		2010	
	ALP vs. Coalition identifiers	ALP vs. Coalition candidates	ALP vs. Coalition identifiers	ALP vs. Coalition candidates	ALP vs. Coalition identifiers	ALP vs. Coalition candidates
Taxes	12.1***	45.4***	3.3*	39.6***	5.5***	42.6***
Redistribution	-22.1***	-50.6***	-17.6***	-37.5***	-16.4***	-43.1***
Union power	23.9***	64.7***	29.2***	62.6***	27.2***	67.1***
Regulate unions	19.0***	56.2***	26.1***	51.1***	23.8***	55.4***
<i>Average distance</i>	19.3	54.2	19.1	47.7	18.2	52.1
Legalise marijuana	12.0***	-35.8***	-10.0***	-38.8***	-6.9***	-29.7***
Death penalty	5.0**	36.3***	5.8**	18.6***	7.6***	16.7***
Stiffer sentences	4.4***	30.5***	6.5***	19.3***	4.3***	34.5***
Sex and nudity	7.5***	17.6***	4.6***	11.1**	5.3***	6.6*
<i>Average distance</i>	7.2	30.1	6.7	21.2	6.0	21.9

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2010), McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2010), Bean, Gow and McAllister (2001), Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2001), McAllister and Mughan (1987), McAllister, Mughan and Sim (1987).

Table 7.9. Inter-coefficient distances between Labor and Coalition voters and candidates.

	1990		2001		2010	
	ALP candidates vs. identifiers	Coalition candidates vs. identifiers	ALP candidates vs. identifiers	Coalition candidates vs. identifiers	ALP candidates vs. identifiers	Coalition candidates vs. identifiers
Taxes	20.8***	7.2***	22.1***	7.7***	24.6***	17.3***
Redistribution	-16.6***	-7.1**	-5.2	-3.2	-6.3	-7.7**
Union power	34.1***	10.0***	25.4***	4.5*	27.5***	12.4***
Regulate unions	31.6***	7.9***	17.4***	5.6**	25.8***	16.4***
<i>Average distance</i>	25.8	8.1	17.5	5.2	21.1	13.5
Legalise marijuana	-10.6*	-4.9	-16.5***	-9.5***	-14.5**	-18.2***
Death penalty	34.9***	21.0***	33.0***	20.7***	25.0***	23.9***
Stiffer sentences	25.4***	9.7***	17.8***	11.9***	26.2***	19.9***
Sex and nudity	4.6	-0.7	6.7*	2.2	3.8	3.7
<i>Average distance</i>	18.9	9.1	18.5	11.1	17.4	16.4

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Source(s): McAllister, Bean, Gibson and Pietsch (2010), McAllister, Pietsch, Bean and Gibson (2010), Bean, Gow and McAllister (2001), Gibson, Gow, Bean and McAllister (2001), McAllister and Mughan (1987), McAllister, Mughan and Sim (1987).

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